

Batman: The Man Made of Nothing:

By Logan Monaco

Chapter 1: Failure

It was a cloudless night in the outskirts of Bludhaven as Nightwing in his black and blue costume with a black mask covering his eyes, arrived on his motorbike near a massive business facility that had a warehouse attachment in the rear part of the facility, both buildings were marked with the Stagg Industries logo. Nightwing parked his bike, then used his grappling hook to get to the business building's roof to find an entry way to sneak into the building. As he searched the roof a call came into his earpiece.

"Oracle to Nightwing, I see you made it to the facility", said Oracle, using a GPS tracking system to keep an eye on Nightwing's position.

"Yeah, security so far seems to be lacking. Not a guard to be seen around the building despite plenty of vehicles parked in the rear part of the warehouse. Little too quiet for my liking, especially when a pretty big chemical deal was supposed to go down", said Nightwing, as he is able to find a vent big enough for him to maneuver in.

"Well, keep your wits about you. The moment Stagg is alerted that he's being investigated or searched for anything the cover ups will begin and we will have nothing to pin on him", said Oracle.

"I know. I know. It'll be fine, we were trained by the best were we not? And besides it's not like we're dealing with our usual baddies. Just your typical corporate corruption", said Nightwing, as he quietly maneuvered his way through the vent, while looking for any openings to exit them.

"Maybe so, I'm not sure how much you know about Simon Stagg, but the man has a bit of a history. It isn't exactly your run of the mill. The guy deals in making chemicals for countless foreign groups and companies for reasons unknown. Not to mention", explained Oracle before being cut off by Nightwing.

"If you're going to say allegations of human experimentation with these chemicals, then yes I am aware, to reiterate what you said earlier. Any whiff of a possible investigation and the clean house protocol is initiated", said Nightwing with his voice trailing, as he exited the vent noticing blood on the ground.

"What's wrong? Do you see something", asked Oracle in a concerned tone.

"Babs, we got blood", said Nightwing, as he pulled out his escrima sticks from the attachment on his back hitting a button on the sticks that made a blue light glow close to the top of the weapons.

"Uh oh, maybe a deal went bad. Just be careful Nightwing and keep in touch. I'm going to alert Bludhaven authorities. Oracle out", she said as the earpiece cut out.

Nightwing began investigating the facility, noticing the walls had bullet holes and blood spots sprinkled throughout the hallway. A battle was clearly fought here, which explains why there was no security outside the building. Now he wondered as he checked the offices and searched several floors using the vents avoiding the staircases and elevators to prevent any unexpected confrontation. As he searched multiple floors starting from the top making his way down to the bottom floor, gunshots suddenly were heard. Nightwing made his way over to where the gunshots were heard. He followed the voice echoing through the vents coming from what looked to be armed mercenaries in full black body armor, wielding automatic rifles. Nightwing listened closely to make out what the mercenaries were saying.

“Boss, we cleared out the facility. Making our way to your position now”, said the mercenary, holding his gloved hand to his ear as though speaking into an earpiece.

Nightwing stealthily made his way out of the vents and carefully followed the mercs outside the building to the warehouse as he used his grappling hook to get to the top of the warehouse to find another way into the building. He grappled his way to the roof noticing glass sections. He made his way over to a nearby window carefully gaining access trying to remain quiet. Nightwing entered the warehouse and sneaked his way to an upper floor balcony. He walked the upper balcony until he could hear the voices of the assailants who attacked the facility, which led him to find a small group of armed mercenaries standing over a group of hostages who were tied up and sitting on the warehouse floor. Nightwing noticed an auburn-haired woman wearing tactical gear armed with several kinds of explosives speaking with two individuals that stood out from the rest of the mercenaries. One was also a female with light brown skin, multi-colored short hair, wearing a teal reflective colored based hoodie custom made to have an insect design with different colored nail polish per finger nail, carrying a computer bag, and didn't appear to have any weapons. The other was the complete opposite. Definitely the most imposing, the merc stood very tall at least a foot and a half taller than anyone in the warehouse and built like a tank wearing a black ski mask and black tactical gear, but no weapon. The guy maybe could even give Bane a run for his money since the builds were similar. Nightwing for the most part was able to make out what the female merc was saying.

“This may not have much effect now what we've done here, but hey it's a small start. The message will be clear enough when it's rubble. Netbug, you and the boys get everything packed up we're done here”, she ordered the techy looking merc who complied. She and the other armed mercs started grabbing their bags and equipment before exiting the warehouse.

Before Nightwing had a chance to make a move the female merc pulled out a 9mm pistol and shot the hostages point blank in the head. The large merc stood close by as Nightwing felt a gut punch everytime the trigger of the gun was pulled. Nightwing didn't think twice and with quick precision threw one of his escrima sticks knocking the gun out of the female merc's hand. With a few acrobatic maneuvers he was already on top of the massive merc hitting him with multiple knee strikes and kicks, though it seemed to have very little effect as the large merc barely flinched or moved. Nightwing backed off as he looked at the female merc recognizing her.

"I know who you are. Bette Sans Souci AKA Plastique. Never took you for running a crew of guns for hire. Weren't you in custody at Belle Reve", he asked, while keeping a close eye on the large merc waiting for him to make a move.

"You can call this a personal matter that I and the big guy have with Stagg Industries. Makes things easier when you meet a few like minded people who are as vengeful as I am. And every person we've gunned down tonight weren't exactly decent folk", said Plastique, not too bothered by Nightwing's interference.

"It doesn't matter who they were. You didn't have a right to kill them. All you're doing is continuing the chain of violence. What's the point when you already know no matter the outcome, it's just going to end with you either behind bars or dead. I've been doing this a long time Plastique, if you don't stop your story won't be any different", said Nightwing, trying to keep Plastique talking to give authorities more time to arrive to back him up.

"Continuing the chain of violence huh? Okay, maybe if your government will learn it's not polite to put bombs in people's necks, for sketchy, suicidal, black op missions. And also not kill our loved ones right in front of us! Maybe that'll break the chain. Or to state the fucking obvious, that it's human fucking nature to stomp each other out", Plastique said in a cold and angry tone.

"Wait. Bombs in people's necks. Can we start from the beginning? What are you talking about", asked Nightwing, caught off guard by Plastique's statement.

"Oh yeah hero, that's our justice system. You do your duty, make mistakes, a few people die who weren't supposed to, you get blamed and you become an expandable pawn expected to die. And when you don't, well the government likes to have their assurances. Those people lying dead over there, two of them helped create the chemicals here that are used to destroy other countries' crops and create famine for innocent lives. The rest were guilty by association with this organization whose main purpose is to make money on death and despair, but who cares if it strengthens the economy. Look cutie, I don't have any more time to argue ideologies when I have an industry to burn", Plastique said, not displaying an ounce of concern or remorse as she knows Nightwing has no chance of winning a confrontation against them.

"You're not going to burn anything. Now stand down. I understand you're angry, but come quietly and we can figure everything out. This doesn't have to end like it always does", said Nightwing getting in a stance ready for a fight.

"Oh, trust me bird boy. With my friend here, you're going to regret playing hero tonight", smiled Plastique as she looked up at the massive merc. "Don't be too long, everything goes up in a few minutes. We'll wait for you nearby, just try not to put on too much of a show. You get too carried away sometimes", she continued, as she tugged his arm lowering his head as she kissed him on his mask covered cheek before heading for the exit.

Nightwing pulled out a custom batarang and threw it at Plastique, but the large mercenaries' reflexes were far faster than Nightwing could ever have expected, as the merc caught the batarang midair then dropped it to the floor. BK clenched his fists and got into a orthodox boxing stance. Nightwing quickly uses his agility to reach his second escrima stick that he threw earlier at Plastique and prepares for the fight ahead. Nightwing clicked a hidden built-in device in his mask bringing down lenses in front of his eyes that had thermal vision as he pulled out multiple small smoke pellets, throwing them creating a smoke screen as the mercenary without hesitation charged into the smoke at Nightwing. It was strange though, the merc didn't display hardly any body heat making him difficult to see in the smoke. The mercenary blindly threw heavy swings trying to land a shot on Nightwing. As the hero was able to dodge incoming stickers he landed a few lucky attacks in multiple joints of the mercenary with the escrima sticks relying on his hearing rather than his eyes. Each blow from the escrima sticks inflicted electrical charges, but the charges seemed to have little effect. Nightwing started to realize his opponent was more than the typical oversized brute. His escrima sticks were charged with over 50,000 volts in the taser mechanism and yet the big guy would barely flinch let alone take a knee. He knew now, this guy required a harsher approach if he was going to go down. The smokescreen started to clear as BK could now see an outline of Nightwing's shape as he started throwing quick powerful jabs as the hero used his agility to bob and weave dodging the massive fists as he went on the attack. The merc was skilled in combat not relying on his size but technique with clear use of boxing experience, only Nightwing was much faster and lighter on his feet getting in every shot he could as the fight appeared to be going in his favor. All that changed within a few seconds as Plastique, at a safe distance, set off the charges in the main facility in front of the warehouse. Like a machine gun, explosions can be heard going off distracting Nightwing for a mere second, which was all the large merc needed to put his hands on him with unexpected speed, upper cutting Nightwing in the stomach knocking the wind out of the hero, then kneeling him in the chest cracking a few ribs. Nightwings shock absorbers in his armor weren't enough. The merc with inhuman strength grabbed Nightwing on both sides holding his arms against his body as though being crushed, head butting him in the face breaking his nose before tossing him full force at one the warehouse shelves knocking it over as equipment contained on the shelves all fell to the ground, while the sound was drowned out by explosions from the nearby facility building imploding on itself. The entire warehouse floor rumbled and shook. Dust and debris clouded over the entire warehouse as the merc made his way over to Nightwing still dazed from the headbutt, while blood flowed from his broken nose. A static voice could be heard coming from BK's belt as Nightwing staggered to get back to his feet.

"Hey, BK come in! It's Netbug. Boss says if you haven't killed Nightwing yet to hurry up, the incendiaries will be going off any second. Time to go big guy. Netbug over and out", said Netbug as the radio cut out.

Nightwing was almost in arms length of BK as he approached quickly. He gathered enough of his bearings to flip out of the way of the mercenaries' grasp, using his escrima sticks smashing them on both sides of BK's head at full charge. Finally, for the first time in this fight, after hitting this monster over a hundred times getting nowhere. The mercenary screamed in pain throwing a heavy punch into Nightwing's chest making him fly back landing on the warehouse floor. BK

held his head in pain as Nightwing coughed blood as he slowly got back to his feet fighting back the agony in his face and ribs. Suddenly, incendiary explosives started to go off around the warehouse lighting the whole place on fire. Nightwing and BK looked upon each other as the fire raged on as they prepared for one last brawl. Nightwing quickly drew his grappling hook firing it into the mercs shoulder as he leaped in the air towards BK as the cable simultaneously pulled Nightwing. The movement was so fast BK had no time to defend himself. Nightwing hit the merc with a heavy knee to the face before using a combo of attacks with the escrima sticks. The hero started to show signs of fatigue as the merc didn't display any using his boxing skills, hitting multiple shots on Nightwing as the hero would strike back blow for blow. The two wailed on each other before the fire became too out of control with smoke becoming too much making it difficult for Nightwing to breath. His lungs burning with the warehouse around him starting to fall apart with the fire raging on. Beaten and bloodied Nightwing starred at BK who showed no signs of injury. A wave of shame and disgrace came over Nightwing. He can't win. No matter how hard he tried to take this guy down nothing worked despite repeatedly using the one move that seemed to hurt him. Nightwing has faced all kinds of villains, but none who could take a beating like this monster could. He had no choice even with every fiber of his being telling him to not give up, but there's no denying the reality. The fight was over and he wasn't going to win. Nightwing with one last ditch effort took a fighting stance. He'd rather die on his feet than run but to his surprise, BK suddenly turned his back on Nightwing and ran towards the nearest warehouse wall. The massive merc charged and smashed his way through the fire and rubble exiting the building. Nightwing stood for a moment dumbfounded, but snapped out of it fast enough to realize the whole building was about to collapse any second. He pulled out a small device clicking a button that signaled his motorbike to his location as he sprinted towards the exit making it out of the building. The motorbike appeared in front of the chain link fence in front of Nightwing as he climbed over reaching his bike and riding off before the warehouse collapsed. He then clicked a button on his earpiece calling for Oracle.

"Oracle, you there? Barbara. I'm heading to the clock tower", said Nightwing, as he tried to keep himself from passing out from the pain as blood was smeared all over his face from his broken nose.

"Dick, what happened, are you okay? I've been listening in on the police scanners. They just arrived at the facility where you were and said the buildings were destroyed", asked Oracle, in a worried tone.

"I'll explain everything when I get to the clock tower. If I don't pass out first. See you soon and have the first aid kit ready please", said Nightwing doing his best to stay focused as he quickly rode back to the clock tower maintaining consciousness.

After some time went by, Nightwing arrived at the clock tower, entering the building's elevator as he entered a special sequence that gained entrance to Oracle's floor. When he entered the elevator he could no longer stand resting against the elevator wall slumping to the floor. Everything for a moment faded and he passed out with the sensation of the elevator moving. He soon came back to consciousness as Nightwing found himself lying on the couch and felt relief

surrounded by the tech, furniture, and files that made him feel at home as Barbara's voice was heard.

"Jesus Dick, what did they do to you? I'm relieved you're awake. I haven't seen you take a beating like this since.....", she said horrified, sitting by the couch in her wheelchair as she applied bandages and cleaned the blood on Dick's face.

"The war. You're right. Feels like an eternity ago", Dick admitted shamefully, in a quiet tone as this statement made Oracle think back on the days she was Batgirl fighting alongside Batman, Nightwing and Robin. As a look of concern in her eyes became sorrowful

"Who did this to you? Start from the beginning and explain how it all unfolded", Oracle said, while cleaning up Dick's face removing his mask.

"Would you believe me when I say, one guy did this. If Bruce can see me now", he said, as Barbara looked at him with a dumbfounded expression. "I know. Crazy isn't it? Barbara, with no exaggeration I hit this guy with everything I had and then some. The man showed no sign of fatigue nor injury. I hit him so hard, even if he was on drugs he'd be in a coma. Nothing. Nothing worked. If he wasn't the one who walked away. I honestly wouldn't have made it back here", he continued, in a shocked and shameful tone as Barbara put her arms around him hugging him gently.

"Start from the beginning with who you went up against and what happened", asked Barbara, looking Nightwing in the eyes.

"It was a group of mercenaries. They were being led by Bette San Souci or Plastique as she goes by these days. She was a small-time corporate saboteur and before that a member of the government's Black ops unit. Had a run in with her a few years back before she became what she is now. They had a techy with them called Netbug. And the big guy who did this to me. They called him BK. Strange thing is about him. He didn't just rely on his size to fight like most brutes do. He fought like a boxer with actual technique. Never saw anything like it. In the middle of the brawl the main facility was blown to bits and incendiaries were set up all around the warehouse. The whole place lit up. BK kicked my ass and then left before everything collapses around us and now here I am. Like I said I couldn't hurt him. Couldn't even make him take a knee. It was like fighting an unbreakable wall", Dick explained, in his frustrated and shameful tone.

"I'll do some digging. An unbeatable guy with that size description who uses boxing skills should stand out pretty easily in the criminal network. He may be a possible meta-human we don't know about. And as for the techy you described, I know her. Netbug. She's a small-time hacker who usually wipes criminal records, provides new identities, or makes false websites and apps to make money. She used to work for the government on special projects, but she went awol", she said, in a curious tone.

“Interesting, see if we can do some digging on Plastique’s history with Stagg. Netbug too. She told me when I confronted her that the matter was personal. We can bet that what happened tonight isn’t the end of the matter and they may try to make their way to the HQ in Gotham”, Dick said, as he rested on the couch giving his body time to heal.

“We should inform Bruce, give him a heads up on what he might be up against”, Barbara stated, as though treading lightly with each word hoping that Dick isn’t still angry with Bruce.

There was a silence that fell upon the room that felt like it could’ve lasted a millenia, until Dick lifted himself up staring down at the floor, before finally opening his mouth to speak.

“You’re right Babs. He needs to be warned, but not just about Plastique and her crew. We also need to do some digging to see if we can uncover the connection between our criminals and what happened with Stagg Industries”, he said, as though he was taking a large amount of weight off his shoulders. “Once we know more and I’ve healed. We will head to Gotham whether Bruce wants us there or not”, he continued.

Chapter 2: Date Night

A few days have passed since the incident in Bludhaven, and they are picking up the pieces Gotham is in a time of moderate peace. Of course, there is petty crime that the Gotham City Police have to deal with, but right now things are prosperous and in the simplest terms normal. It has been seven months since the last real danger came to Gotham in the form of Mister Freeze who was put away in Arkham Asylum. Gothamites now enjoy their days nearly as carefree as those in Metropolis. At Wayne Manor, Alfred Pennyworth was busy preparing for the evening's meal. Once finished he made his way to one of Wayne Manor's dens. The room was huge with a small library, a grand piano, large marble fire-place, and first class furniture with a place specifically to play chess on a black and white marble board. Alfred walked over to the grandfather clock attached to the wall and pulled on a lever inside the clock, which triggered a mechanism opening up one of the bookshelves. This led down a man-made concrete set of stairs straight down to the bat-cave. Alfred made his way into the main chamber where the cave lights were lit displaying the bat-jet, the platform of the bat-mobile, a giant Joker playing card, A massive copper penny, and a life-size robotic T-rex. These were but a few artifacts displayed in the gargantuan cave as Alfred could see no one sitting at the section where the bat-computer was set up. He could, however, hear commotion coming from the training section of the cave as he started making his way over to where voices can be heard. When Alfred makes it to the training section Bruce Wayne who was tall, in prime physical shape, blue eyes, and jet black hair wearing a black tank-top and black sweatpants. He was practicing with a young teenage girl with orange-reddish hair, with a slender but athletic frame with toned gymnast legs practicing hand to hand combat with Bruce pausing the bout to provide advice.

“Carrie, remember your hands and arms need to be used for defense only until you get stronger. For now, I want you to focus all your offense on your legs. It’s a start until I have time to teach you to utilize pressure points and different holds to bring down your opponents without boxing or wrestling them. Don’t ever let the fights drag out any longer than you need too”, Bruce instructed.

“Roger, that boss. I’m ready whenever you are”, said Carrie, who had a focused determined look on her face, as though planning out every move she was about to make.

Bruce took his combat stance as did Carrie, while Alfred stood by observing with a blank expression on his face. Carrie made a swift move conducting multiple backflips away from Bruce creating distance displaying advanced agility. She backflips her way to the weapons wall knowing she can’t win head-on, so a distraction is needed to gain a bit of an edge to create an opening. She grabbed a wooden staff and charged at Bruce performing incredible agility, while also twirling the staff. Bruce stood his ground not moving a muscle waiting for Carrie’s move. Once she got close enough, with all her strength brought down the staff on Bruce as he caught it with his hand, while Carrie immediately released her grip from the staff. Moving in for a strike, Carrie put all her strength into a kick, but before she could blink Batman caught the kick. There was a pause as Carrie expected to be attacked , but Bruce released her foot and the match was over.

“Distractions are always a good strategy against untrained opponents, but ones who are focused, you best be sure to be either faster or stronger when you make your move. Otherwise, what happened here will be the result, only the consequences in real combat will be far more dire”, said Bruce, as he noticed a great amount of disappointment on Carrie’s face. “Chin up, take what you learn from your mistakes and make it a strength. Now, on to other business. Alfred I take it food will be ready soon”, Bruce continued, grabbing a small towel off a nearby cabinet that was stocked in white towels to wipe the sweat off as he grabbed a second one to throw over to Carrie.

“Of course, Master Bruce. Tonight’s meal is Scandinavian steak with potatoes. I assume young Ms. Kelley will be joining us tonight”, asked Alfred, looking at Carrie as though expecting her to say yes.

“Absolutely! I have nowhere else to be tonight”, Carrie said excitedly smiling as Bruce and Alfred gave each other a glance.

“Wonderful, I just wanted to make sure I’m not making too much food. I’ll head back up, while you two continue”, said Alfred, as turned back to head up to the manor.

“Good work today on sparring practice. There will of course be more to work on, but”, Bruce paused as an alarm went off on the bat-computer for a few seconds.

“What was that”, asked Carrie confused yet curious.

“That was an alarm I get whenever a message comes in from Bludhaven. Usually it means something important has come up. Or most likely an emergency”, said Bruce as his tone changed completely as the look in his eyes became almost aggressive.

Batman made his way over to a set of monitors with the middle monitor being massive with a large Bat insignia flashing as the background turned red and blue, while Carrie followed. The desks attached to the computer desk creating a square layout were covered in forensic equipment and different size scanners. Bruce clicked a button on the computer changing the screen to a page covered in files. He clicked on one listed as Bludhaven that showed emails from Oracle. A new email was on the top of the list and he clicked on it revealing a video link. Batman clicked on the link and a recorded video of Oracle came on the screen.

“Hello, Batman. It’s not too often something comes up these days, but unfortunately we have a problem that may end up affecting Gotham. Right now, we’re still digging into the matter, but a few days have gone by since an incident occurred here in Bludhaven and it wasn’t good. Nightwing is fine, but still recovering from his injuries. A small group of saboteurs led by Bette Sans Souci AKA Plastique, managed to detonate explosives destroying two buildings. A chemical warehouse and a business facility belonging to Stagg industries. Stagg’s HQ is in Gotham, along with two company plants on the outskirts. This group will make their way to Gotham, so be ready. Nightwing says, they have a guy who could pose a problem even for you. He’s as imposing physically as Bane, but no matter what was done to him, Nightwing had no way to beat him in a fight. Be careful Batman and take care of yourself”, said Oracle as the video cut out.

“Sounds like Gotham is about to have some trouble on the way. Do you think I’ll be able to help you fight what’s coming”, asked Carrie in a concerned tone, with a worried look on her face.

“If I feel you are ready. But for now focus on your training and until this possible threat arrives there’ll be other tasks in the meantime. Go get cleaned up and ready for dinner I’ll see you and Alfred upstairs”, said Bruce, as he sat in the computer chair clicking on a file as he delved into looking up Plastique, while Carrie started to make her way up to manor, but Bruce looked up at the screen and then spoke.

“Wait”, he said loud enough for Carrie to hear, making her turn around to look at Bruce curious as to why he would stop her. “In case, this is an enemy we may be facing later or more than likely sooner. You should see how I conduct research and the kind of systems the bat-computer uses to help us learn about certain foes. Most importantly how to prepare to engage them”, said Bruce, while he thought to himself that if things are going to change he needs to be more inviting when it comes to conducting research in his investigations. Giving Carrie the choice is the beginning in building trust in this new partnership.

“Seriously boss. Hell yeah let’s get started”, said Carrie at first confused, but she couldn’t hold back the smile as Batman was asking to teach her and maybe even help him. Carrie came over next to Batman as they began conducting research on Plastique as a team.

The sun began to set in Gotham as light pollution covered the night sky. A couple was driving over one of the many Gotham city bridges. The woman wearing make-up, had freshly salooned brunette hair, and a black dress who was driving a light blue vehicle looked over to her passenger who was a handsome, light blonde-haired man, strong physique, wearing a black suit looking back at her. The pair smiled at each other as the man opened his mouth to speak.

“I hope you’ll like the overlook. I figured it would be a nice place to finish out our evening”, said the man nervously.

“To be honest I haven’t been to the Overlook in quite some time, so it’ll be nice I’m sure. The company especially”, said the woman blushing with her cheeks getting a little flushed.

“I completely agree. It’s been a very long time since I’ve gone, but it’s nice I’ll get to share the sights. Although, I may be a bit distracted by something far more beautiful than the city glowing in the night”, said the man smiling as he turned to look down the road.

“Oh, shut up! Stop being so charming”, said the woman turning more red than before.

“Make me! Stop making it easy to compliment you”, said the man in a joking manner.

“I don’t think I fit this person you’re talking about”, said the woman trying to joke around with the man.

“I disagree. But I think from here on I’ll let my actions speak for themselves”, said the man reaching out and touching the woman’s thigh as he could hear a subtle gasp.

“Craig, I’m driving silly”, said the woman, starting to breathe a little nervously.

“I know Colleen. Don’t worry we can wait until we get to our destination”, smiled Craig, knowing that Colleen was as interested as he was.

The couple arrived at the Gotham overlook parking the car. They wasted no time as they both got out from the front of the car making their way to the back starting to makeout and feel each other.

An hour had gone by as the couple got redressed and presentable enough to step outside the vehicle and make their way to the gated edge as Colleen held onto Craig’s arm. When they reached the edge and looked over the city’s beauty for a few moments, Colleen spoke.

"I lived here in Gotham for a long time. There aren't many moments like this where you can see this side of the city. Most of the time it almost feels the place is cursed. Almost, damned, so to speak", said Colleen admiring the view, still holding onto Craig's arm, smiling.

"Wish I could say the same. Gotham. It's no place to raise a family let alone start one. I've tried to once. It didn't work", said Craig coldly, also almost sounding like he was choking up a little.

"What happened? You can tell me", said Colleen, in a sincerely concerned tone letting go of Craig's arm to grab his shoulders and turn him to face her.

Craig looked her up and down with a caring and loving gaze, before raising his hand to brush Colleen's hair downward before rubbing the back of his hand against her cheek gently. His hand then made its way down to her neck grabbing it tightening around her neck. Colleen's eyes bulged as she struggled to breathe trying to pry his hand off her neck to no avail as Craig was inhumanly strong. He raised her entire body with one arm off the ground without any sign of a struggle as his loving gaze became empty and cold. She continued to struggle scratching at hitting his arm with no effect, as he lifted her high enough to hold her over the railing above the cliffside. He opened his mouth to speak as tears streamed down Colleen's eyes as her face was turning from red to blue.

"If it's any consideration. I really did try to like you Colleen. But I'm afraid you just didn't make me feel the way she did. Not even close. What I said though is true. You are beautiful. As beautiful as Gotham's glow in the night sky. And good news. You dropped your purse, which means I can use your car. Thanks for the evening. It's one I'll do my best not to forget for a while. When you fall, try to land head first, so it's quick. I'd hate for a sweet girl like you to suffer", said Craig in a cold monotone voice, his eyes were empty, but seemed to stare through Colleen's soul, while retaining a sweet grin.

Craig suddenly released his hand as Colleen screamed all the way down the cliffside before disappearing into the dark when the screaming eventually went silent. Craig looked down to see Colleen's purse. He grabbed it and rummaged through finding her keys, then dropped the purse on the concrete ground of the overlook as though not a care in the world. He got into her car, turned on the radio listening to some music, then drove off.

Chapter 3: The Narrows

The next morning Commissioner Gordon was driving his car to the crime scene that was received by Detectives Harvey Bullock and Renee Montoya by a bystander who was hiking near the Gotham Overlook cliffside. Gordon found all the emergency vehicles lined up with their lights flashing in code. He parked behind a firetruck and got out of his car to approach the crime scene where Detective Bullock appeared in the brush waving his arms flagging Gordon in his direction.

"Morning detectives, I get the feeling you two have something that's going to ruin our whole week", he said begrudgingly.

"Commissioner, a body has been reported below the cliff of the overlook. A young woman. We're having forensics looking into it, but uhh", paused Harvey as he looked over at Montoya uncomfortably.

"This was no accident. Nor was it suicide", Montoya said, looking from Harvey to Gordon worriedly.

"So, this was more likely a murder", Gordon said, preparing for the worst outcome, so as not to be caught off guard. "Well, things weren't going to stay quiet forever", Gordon continued.

"This was definitely murder Commissioner. The victim had obvious signs of strangulation, but from what our people gathered the young lady was still alive before the fall. Possibly there was a struggle, then whoever the killer was threw our girl off the ledge", said Harvey, putting together the pieces of a possible outcome of what occurred.

Gordon listened, while observing the crime scene and then he looked up the cliffside with a pondering look on his face before looking back at his detectives.

"Poor kid. That must've been a horrifying fall. Have we checked out the overlook itself yet", he asked curiously, as though hoping his detectives have some evidence for the case to get closer to catching this person swiftly.

"Not yet sir, we've been focused on the victim and getting a feel for what happened here first. After meeting with you we were going to make our way up there", said Montoya curious as to what Gordon had running his head.

"Well, for now finish things up here and gather any evidence you find and I mean everything you find is that understood", ordered Gordon, as he started heading back to his car.

"Yes sir", the two detectives said simultaneously.

Gordon made it back to his car, then headed up the overlook to investigate if anything was there to find. When he pulled up to the overlook he exited the car. He immediately noticed the purse and ran over to it and then called his people on his phone.

“Hey Bullock, bring forensics up here. I got something”, he said, hanging up, grabbing some rubber gloves from his jacket, then pulling out a pen.

Gordon used the pen to carefully check inside the purse noticing no blood on it or around it. He was able to gaze inside the purse noticing the woman’s wallet and phone were still inside, which was good making it easy to identify their victim and closer to possibly figuring out who killed her. When Detectives Bullock and Montoya arrived with some of the forensics team, Montoya holding her phone, approached Gordon to speak.

“Commissioner, it’s possible we may have something more to this”, she said, the look on her face was conflicted with concern, but also pride like she found another piece to the puzzle.

“What do you got Montoya”, asked Gordon curiously.

“I looked into possible crimes in the surrounding areas and there quite a few missing persons and unsolved murder cases that have popped up in the past few weeks. The reason we don’t know about them is because they’re out of our jurisdiction. Out of site and out of mind for us. Maybe it’s possible, even though we can’t be sure without proper evidence that we have a serial killer that made their way to Gotham”, explained Montoya.

“Well, one thing we know for sure. A murder took place here, so we won’t rule anything out yet. Best thing to do is keep our eyes and ears open and maybe give a friend a call when the sun goes down”, said Gordon as he looked upon the overlook holding onto the railing looking down the cliffside, then looking upon the city. “I’m sure at night the view must’ve been quite something “, he muttered to himself as he looked upon the city.

Later That Day

Gotham High School rang the final bell for the day as Carrie with her best friend Michelle who was slender, but a little taller than Carrie, with dark brown hair and fair skin similar to Carrie, wearing jeans and a red shirt carrying a velvet book bag. Carrie was wearing a red and yellow hoodie, with blue jeans, and light green lensed glasses, while holding a folded scooter as the girls were talking walking away from the school.

“Is it just me or are these days getting shorter as we’re getting older”, asked Carrie in a joking tone.

“Are you kidding? Classes were dragging at a sluggish pace all week. I don’t know how it is that you pass out half way through classes, but still manage a near 4.0. It’s not fair”, exclaimed Michelle with a bit of jealousy in her voice.

“Hey, look if you need me to tutor your dumbass self, just ask, you know I always have your back. When I’m available”, Carrie said playfully, smiling a toothy grin.

“You hardly are these days, which you still have neglected to tell me your job”, said Michelle rolling her eyes ignoring Carrie’s goofy grin.

“Oh, hey is that your brother’s car? You gotta go and so do I later see you tomorrow”, said Carrie in a hurried tone, avoiding the question quickly unfolding her scooter and taking off quickly.

Michelle stood there frozen in confusion at how quickly her friend sped off. She simply shook her head in annoyance as Carrie enjoyed the wind flowing through her hair and rode quickly down the sidewalk. When she came to a stop light she popped in some headphones listening to some music jamming out making her way to the Narrows. The Narrows was a segregated island in the middle of Gotham river that was considered the most dangerous part of the city. A place with countless abandoned buildings and where the last of consistent burglaries, assaults, and even murder take place. A safe haven for the last of Gotham’s underbelly that hasn’t been eradicated by Batman and Commissioner Gordon. A place Carrie considers to be perfect as to what she calls “Practice”. When she crossed the bridge into the Narrows she didn’t do anything to hide her appearance, what she could possibly have, and her vulnerability. She rode deeper into an area that was condemned and abandoned, then folded up her scooter making her way inside one of the buildings that had many broken windows and broken doors. The paint has all but chipped away or faded as though no life has been there in years. Carrie made her way to the roof and started practicing her agility and acrobatics as though chasing a suspect. For over an hour she practiced parkour around the building even jumping onto nearby roof tops. She went back to her backpack to pull out a bottle of water, taking a nice long drink, while wiping the sweat from her forehead. A noise came from the entryway to the building. Carrie watched three grown men come through the door with one of them having a shaved head and scraggly brown beard wearing a dirty white hoodie that could almost be mistaken for brown, shutting the door and laying his back against it opening his mouth to speak.

“Once one of you assholes is done, you’re holding the door. I’m getting a damn turn this time”, he spoke in a bitter gruff voice.

“Just shut the fuck up and stop your bitching Lou. You’ll get some action, just keep looking out for now”, shouted one of the men that was closest to approaching Carrie. “This is Raymon’s initiation, so he gets first dibs, then me and if she’s still alive then you”, the big guy continued.

This one seemed to be the leader of this trio. He was large in size, who appeared also having his head shaved, wearing an oversized black shirt, and baggy jeans with light brown skin. The

one second closest right behind the big guy was the runt of the group and appeared to be the youngest who had fair skin, freshly shaven head, wearing dirty blue jeans and a black tank top.

"I don't know Marco, isn't she kind of young", said Raymon in a nervous tone looking uncertain if he even wants to be there.

Marco turned around punching Raymon in the face knocking him to the ground as Marco stood over him, which gave Carrie the opening she needed to reach her back pack and grab her slingshot along with a handful of white pellets given to her by Batman, then dropping the backpack listening to Marco yelling in Raymon's face.

"You came to us! You practically begged to join The Condemned! Now, either you fuck this little bitch or I throw you off this roof! You get me", shouted Marco angrily, grabbing Raymon's face, then pulling out a knife and putting it to his throat.

"Yeah. Yeah. I get you Marco", said Raymon fearfully, trembling as Marco released his face as it stung from Marco's tight grip as he rubbed it out.

"THAT'S ENOUGH ASSHOLE", yelled Carrie angrily, as she pulled back her sling on the slingshot aiming it right at Marco's face.

Marco started laughing. "Are you serious? That's all your packing! Girl, you're in the Narrows! I'm packing more heat in my fucking pants, then that little toy you got there", he said giggling moving away from Raymon starting to move closer to Carrie. "Now, put that shit down, before my feelings are hurt and I'll make you hurt worse", he continued as his demeanor changed on a dime still moving closer as he got his knife ready.

Carrie smiled as she took the shot firing the white pellet from her slingshot. It hit Marco before he could even take another step as the pellet exploded on impact to his face. White smoke engulfed his entire head, within seconds the man collapsed on the ground like a corpse dropping dead as Carrie swiftly pulled out another white pellet aiming it at Raymon.

"If you don't wish to die like you dumbass friend here, I suggest both of you leave this roof immediately", Carrie shouted angrily.

Raymon froze in place a few seconds stunned by what he had just witnessed when suddenly he turned to see Lou not missing a beat, opening the door and ditching Marco and Raymon both. Raymon then turned back to look at Carrie still aiming her Slingshot at him.

"I will not repeat myself! Piss off or die, make your choice now. Maybe next time you'll learn to make better friends who stand by you instead of animals like them", she exclaimed angrily, ready to release the sling.

“It’s the Narrows! No one gives two fucks about the people here. There ain’t no cops who protect us. No Batman, to beat on and take out the guys in power here. The Narrows don’t matter! What else are we supposed to do, but beg dudes like him for protection”, exclaimed Raymon angrily pointing at Marco, while tearing up.

Raymon made a dash running to Marco’s body grabbing the knife out of his hand and grabbing his hair, lifting Marco’s head exposing his neck, before slitting his throat as blood started to flow from the wound. Carrie reactively released the white pellet hitting Raymon in his upper chest with a burst of white smoke flowing into Raymon’s face knocking him out as he collapsed by Marco. Carrie stood there frozen traumatized with her hands shaking dropping the slingshot to the ground. A wave of overwhelming sickness came over her as she tried not to puke, holding it back best she could with her legs caving in, making her drop to her knees hunching over fighting back the tightening in her gut, while also avoiding looking at Marco’s bloody body. She took a moment to breathe and gain back her composure. Carrie grabbed her backpack, putting away any trace of her being there and putting on a pair of rubber gloves collecting the shattered pieces of the pellets. She pulled out a pair of handcuffs cuffing Raymon who was still unconscious, then pulled out her bat-phone using its untraceable signal to contact the GCPD.

“Hello, there’s been a murder in the Narrows. Suspect is detained on a rooftop located on 11th street”, Carrie explained, doing her best to keep her composure, providing all the information before hanging up and getting away from that building as fast as possible contacting Bruce.

“Carrie are you alright”, Bruce asked in a worried tone.

“Bruce, I went to the Narrows to train. Please come to my position, I screwed up”, Carrie said as tears streamed down her face as Marco’s blood kept flashing in her mind.

“Okay, hang tight I’ll be there soon”, said Bruce in an assuring tone.

Thirty minutes went by before Bruce arrived in a black corvette opening the passenger door without exiting the vehicle. By that time cops already came and arrested Raymon as Carrie was lost in her mind continuously reliving Marco’s throat being slit, before finally noticing Bruce’s vehicle. She stepped down from the stoop entering the vehicle before the corvette took off. Bruce glanced over to Carrie seeing the thousand yard stare on her face as the car made its way out of the Narrows.

“Carrie, I tried to get here as fast as I could”, he said as he glanced at her face knowing all too well what it meant. “You don’t have to speak until you’re ready. I want you to know that despite whatever it was that happened I’ll help you through every step”, Bruce said in a comforting tone that he is trying to be more accustomed too in his approach with Carrie.

“Stop this car Bruce”, Carrie said suddenly, as though breaking herself out of shock.

“Carrie”, Bruce said, before immediately being cut off.

“Please Bruce. Just stop the car a moment”, she said, coming out of her shocked state, but the blood is still flowing along the rooftop floor in her mind.

Bruce acknowledged her request and was able to find a sidewalk in downtown Gotham to park alongside. Bruce only had enough time to turn to Carrie before she spoke again.

“Get out”, said Carrie, in a demanding tone.

“What”, Bruce said, as though caught completely by surprise.

“Just get out of the car. Please Bruce”, exclaimed Carrie with a desperate look in her eye as tears rolled down her face.

“Okay Carrie”, Bruce said again acknowledging her request.

Bruce opened up his door stepping out of the vehicle, while Carrie did the same as he came around the car to meet her and again before he could get a word out. Carrie grabbed Bruce’s suit jacket pulling him in for one of the tightest hugs he’s ever received. He could feel Carrie crying into his chest as he held her the way a father would to comfort his own daughter. The hug lasted for a few moments as people started to notice that Bruce Wayne was out in the open.

“Carrie, let’s get back to the manor. You can tell me everything that transpired and why you were at the Narrows. It’s going to be okay”, he said as he gave Carrie a comforting smile.

Carrie looked up to Bruce and nodded in agreement and they re-entered the car making their way back to the manor. When entering the manor Bruce escorted Carrie to the den that contained the grand-father clock that led to the bat-cave. He sat Carrie down on a chair, then sat in a chair next to her as Alfred entered the den with a silver tray containing a silver tea kettle and three silver cups. Alfred handed a cup to Bruce, then one to Carrie, and before taking one for himself laid the tray on the nearby coffee table.

“Carrie, I’m sure whatever happened has shocked you, and you’re not sure what to do. It’s scary. I once felt that way myself, but these feelings”, Bruce paused as he saw Carrie open her mouth to speak.

“I detained my first murderer”, she said, each word feeling like a hundred pounds of pressure coming off her shoulders, then taking a good long deep breath before sipping some tea.

Bruce was caught completely off guard by this statement glancing over at Alfred, then glancing back at Carrie still staring down at the floor. Bruce himself then took a deep breath.

"I think we should start at the beginning. Tell us why you were in the Narrows in the first place", asked Bruce, taking a sip of tea trying to be understanding and listening to Carrie.

"It isn't the first time. I have gone there a few times now to practice parkour, learning to move properly from building to building. You can only learn so much here in the manor and the cave. I wanted to prepare for when the time comes I'm working by your side on the streets. I was also hoping", she paused taking a moment to figure out how to say the next words that come out of her mouth. "I was hoping I'd be attacked, so I could practice what you taught me on actual criminals. Again.... to be more than ready for if the day came I had to protect you", Carrie explained in a shameful tone.

"Oh Ms. Kelley", said Alfred in a saddened tone glancing over to Bruce concerned, seeing he was laying back in his chair pondering on the words Carrie expressed to him.

"You said you detained your first murderer. Explain to me how", Bruce asked, showing no signs of emotion keeping his face completely stoic.

Carrie explained how the whole situation occurred and how it concluded with her knocking out Raymon and cuffing him, then alerting authorities before calling Bruce with the bat-phone.

"That's how I did it Bruce. I witnessed my first murder and also caught my first real criminal. Although, I feel Raymon did what he felt had to do out of desperation. He talked about Narrows like it was a third world country cut off from everywhere else. Devoid of hope", said Carrie starting to get some semblance of herself back. "Is what he said true Bruce? Is the Narrows forsaken by Gotham? By you", she asked in a worried tone.

"The Narrows Carrie, has been something myself, the commissioner, and even the mayor have been trying to figure out on what would be the best way to help it. Batman can't always be everywhere at once as hard as I try to be and the Narrows is something that Bruce Wayne is better suited to deal with as a whole. Something I'm afraid you're still too young to understand right now. But I promise it's something that I'm trying to tackle once certain obstacles have been resolved. On another topic considering what has transpired today", said Bruce getting up and walking over to the grand-father clock pulling the lever opening the entrance. "It's time we discussed something down in the cave. But maybe another time when you're feeling better. Alfred will take you home once you've had a chance to rest", Bruce continued.

"No! I'm fine! Whatever it is I'm ready now", Carrie said, quickly getting to her feet showing immeasurable strength mentally.

Bruce looked over at Alfred who nodded letting Bruce know it's time.

"Okay Carrie. Okay. Follow me then", he said entering the stairwell to the cave, while Carrie followed behind him.

Bruce escorted Carrie to where the costumes of his previous proteges are displayed, switching on the lights revealing all the costumes, including bat-suits Bruce no longer wears. Bruce then pointed to the end of the displays.

“Carrie what’s in that case belongs to you”, said Bruce, looking proud of Carrie pointing to the end of the display cases.

Carrie made her way over to the case and when she laid eyes on it for a moment every worry or stress Carrie ever felt was gone. She couldn’t express any words as she took steps toward the display case standing in front of a mannequin the same size as her facing her wearing a specially designed Robin suit. It had a black and yellow hood with a matching cape attached at the shoulders. The top was a red and black material specially designed for deflecting bullets and shock absorbers to take impacts from physical attacks and blunt objects. The pants were made from a black material that was tight but insulated with smooth maneuverability with a yellow utility belt wrapped around the waist. Carrie noticed that a mechanism on the wrist had an attachment for a specially designed wrist rocket since she fancies the slingshot as her favorite tool against criminals. Black boots were on the feet and black gloves on the hands. All the fear and despair Carrie was feeling from what she witnessed and the blood that flowed on that roof that once clouded her mind for a moment vanished, but still lingered. It didn’t stop her from looking at Bruce smiling as he walked over putting a hand on her shoulder.

“This life Carrie. Isn’t easy. There will be moments like you experienced today that’ll make you feel the way you do now. Moments that’ll change you forever. When you put on this outfit you’re part of something bigger than you could imagine. You are a member of a family. My family. You are Robin”, said Bruce, proudly as Carrie was overwhelmed with emotion. Despite the horror that was witnessed, she knew that if she was going to be Robin fighting alongside Batman she’ll have to become accustomed to seeing terrible things.

Bruce and Carrie took in the moment, then a call came through Batman’s bat-phone. He answered it and walked away from Carrie.

“Hello, Jim”, Bruce said as his entire demeanor changed into Batman. Carrie noticed the change in Bruce’s voice.

Commissioner Gordon was standing at another crime scene making sure everything was running smoothly, while also having extra officer’s on standby.

“This is bad Batman. We have a head on collision with several fatalities. The casualties are Penguin’s guys, you may wanna get down here before the show gets started”, said Gordon keeping a calm tone amidst the chaos.

“I’m on my way”, said Batman, hanging up as he went to suit up. “Carrie, you’ve seen enough violence tonight. Go get some rest”, Batman continued as he pulled out a remote clicking a button lighting up a section of the cave that held his equipment and current bat-suit.

"I'm ready Bruce! I know what I saw messed me up, but it still didn't stop me from detaining someone", said Carrie in a frustrated tone.

Batman looked at her for a moment as though running a million thoughts through his head all at once, before he hesitantly nodded in agreement.

"Yes, you did. There will be other crime scenes to investigate and criminals to catch. For now, take the night off and get your mind cleared. If you get hungry, Alfred will make you something", Batman said suiting up.

Carrie walked over to the display to get another look at her suit, while she waited to watch the bat-mobile take off as she watched Batman enter the bat-mobile. The engine roared echoing throughout the cave before taking off as Carrie looked on. She then turned to look back at the display case that contained her costume with a light smile, until she noticed her own reflection in the glass. The images of blood again flowed through her mind as her smile slowly faded away.

Chapter 4: Penguin

The bat-mobile took backroads and short-cuts implemented around the city making it easy for the bat-mobile to avoid traffic. Batman exited the vehicle and started making his way to the crime scene. Commissioner Gordon noticed Batman arrive and approached him to fill him in to the crime scene he was about to witness.

"Hello Jim, any further details have developed since we spoke", asked Batman, getting straight to business listening to the events that had transpired.

"Interestingly enough yes, the men here didn't die from the accident. They were either stabbed to death or had their throats slit. The perpetrator, going off the angle of the accident, caused the crash deliberately. No blood or anything in the vehicle for forensics to use, but the curious thing is the vehicle our suspect used, is the same vehicle that we registered as stolen earlier from a prior crime scene this morning. A murder of a young woman, Colleen Smith", Gordon explained to Batman.

"The suspect is believed to be the same perpetrator. I did some research on the surrounding area. Multiple missing persons or unsolved murders in rural areas", said Batman, as though he's putting all the pieces together then observing the Penguin's vehicle. "I take it the Penguin was moving funds out of the city. He never trusted transferring digitally. More likely, he'll make an appearance since he tracks all his vehicles. Do we know how much was taken" Batman asked, curiously.

“Not a clue, but we do know this suspect isn’t greedy. Half the briefcases are still in the vehicle. From the way we see it, he only took what he needed. The only real question is for what purpose”, explained Gordon, in a curious tone.

Batman looked up at the street lamps noticing the traffic cams. They all could hear a couple vehicles suddenly pulling up to the crime with a Black Phantom Rolls-Royce leading two black vans. Penguin stepped out of the Phantom wearing an expensive looking black suit smoking a cigar, wielding an umbrella. About a dozen men exited their vans, some openly wielding automatic weapons. Multiple police officers drew their weapons aiming at the Penguin and his men, while they did the same.

“Oui! Gordon! I know you’re ‘ere with Batman! Come on out so we can talk before I start making things loud”, shouted Penguin, in a gruff cockney accent.

Gordon and Batman went to confront Penguin, as the forensics team dropped what they were doing and ran for cover in case things went south. Batman and Gordon approached him showing no ounce of concern on the outside, but mentally preparing themselves for a fight.

“Gentlemen, thank you for coming out to greet me before I had to take drastic measures. Look, I’m ‘ere to ask a simple question. Is there money still in that vehicle?” Penguin asked calmly, though Batman could tell by the movement in Penguin’s hands displayed signs of anxiety.

“Penguin, it’s evidence. You know how this all goes by now. The money will be released to you once the investigation is over and when we clear it of being used for any criminal activity. Since you’ve claimed to have gone legit there should be no issue”, explained Gordon keeping his hands in his pockets close to his waist as Batman knew Gordon cut a hole in the trench coat right pocket, which allowed him to draw his weapon without being obvious.

“You know that’s not the answer I want to ‘ear”, Penguin said, raising his hand as though readying his men to attack. “There’s supposed to be forty million dollars I have in that van. And no one is going to keep me from getting what I want. I’ll execute every pig or bat that stands between me and my money”, shouted, Penguin angrily.

Batman immediately, with a quick movement too fast for anyone to react, grabbed his grappling hook from his utility belt, then fired it at Penguin. The hook latched onto Penguin’s suit, then repelled him back to Batman’s direction swiftly closing in the distance giving him enough time to grab Penguin. Batman grabbed Penguin by his suit jacket lifting him in the air.

“Tell your men to drop their weapons and go back in their vehicles”, Batman said in a menacing dark tone.

“Alright, alright! Boys! Drop the guns! Go back to the vehicles! Now”, he yelled, in an angered fearful tone.

The Penguins men all looked at each other contemplating for a moment as they slowly lowered their weapons, dropping them to the ground, and walked back to their vehicles. Penguin was then left facing Batman looking dead into his white augmented lenses, while Batman was still holding him by his suit collar above the ground.

“Now, let’s talk”, said Batman, still in his dark menacing tone and lowering Penguin back to his feet.

“Fine, but I still expect to get my money back in full. And whoever did this has forfeited his very existence”, said Penguin, angrily.

“We will find him, Oswald. We just need you to stay out of the way. Otherwise we will detain you and open an investigation as to why a bunch of your goons have illegal automatic weapons and they brought them to a crime scene. Once everything is wrapped up and we get the guy. If the money is legitimate you’ll get it back”, explained Gordon as he lit up some tobacco in his pipe and started smoking.

“Very well. Catch him. I know you will, Batman. You always do. But you can’t protect him in prison”, smiled Penguin menacingly, as he straightened out his wrinkled suit, then took his leave waddling back to his car.

The Penguins vehicle started up and took off with the other vehicles following behind him. The forensics team and the uniformed officers almost all had a sigh of relief that the situation calmed down. They all returned to their duties, while Batman and Gordon took time to look over the crime scene.

“I’m going to get the footage from the traffic cams. I’ll make sure it’s clear enough to get the evidence we need to help find our suspect”, said Batman, in a calm tone.

“Sounds like a plan. Too many are dead already. Need to get a handle on this before it escalates further”, said Gordon, in compliance with Batman.

Batman spent hours looking over the scene from top to bottom as he searched for any clue he could gather on the one responsible for the vehicle collision. He then made his way over to the Penguin’s van looking inside and noticed eight slots containing black briefcases with only four briefcases remaining with the other half missing. Batman realized half the forty million of Penguin’s money was taken, and hoped that the CCTV footage from the traffic cameras would provide better context to the crime scene. Gordon approached Batman, noticing he started heading for the bat-mobile.

“You got something”, he asked curiously hoping that Batman found something his team couldn’t.

"I'll be in touch", Batman said as he entered the bat-mobile then took off.

Chapter 5: The Droplet

Batman returned to the Bat-cave exiting the bat-mobile noticing that Carrie was at the computer desk in her Robin outfit. He approached Carrie removing his cowl noticing she was sleeping laying her head on her arms at the bat computer. Batman noticed footsteps coming from behind him and heard Alfred's voice.

"She refused to leave the cave until you returned, Master Bruce. Ms. Kelley appears to share in your stubbornness. She practiced for a long time getting a feel for her costume", he said, as his voice echoed through the cave. He stood on the balcony above the costume displays of Batman's previous protégés and obsolete suits. Alfred started to make his way down to the bat computer as Bruce spoke looking down at Carrie.

"Do you remember why I picked her, Alfred? Why I even considered allowing her to be a part of this life", asked Bruce, curious as to what Alfred might say.

"I think the key word that doesn't belong in that question is "Allowing". I honestly believe Ms. Kelley would be trying to help people whether you brought her into the fold or not", said Alfred, knowing all too well his experience being with Bruce and the other members of the Bat-family.

"You're right, Alfred. When I heard about her taking on purse snatchers, helping those in minor emergencies, and simply doing what she could to make Gotham a bit better. Despite her upbringing she wants to do good. And she puts herself out there without any tech or highly skilled training", Bruce said in a subtly proud tone.

"Just make sure she's ready. Training her hard and preparing her to the best of your abilities like you did with Master Richard and Ms. Gordon is all well and good. But I think you know what I'm going to say next", Alfred said in a calm, but concerned tone.

"Gotham is still Gotham....", Bruce said trailing off taking a pause. "I can only hope for when a specific moment comes she doesn't just survive but also rises from it", said Batman in a concerned tone.

"Specific moment, Master Bruce hasn't the poor thing been through enough", Alfred asked confused.

"I'm talking about *"The"* moment, Alfred. What she went through was a traumatizing experience, but when you're tested to the pinnacle of your physical and mental ability to keep fighting and surviving. The moment you decide that even though you have no control and no chance of winning. You still find a way to keep going", said Bruce putting his hand on Carrie's shoulder hearing her slight change in breathing knowing she has been awake half way through his conversation with Alfred. Bruce looks at Alfred with a small smirk and Alfred immediately catches on.

"Well Master Bruce, just remember she is still a teenager and some freedom to be so, can do Ms. Kelley some good. Now, I dare say, we must get the young lady up and bring her to her room to rest for what little there is left of the morning", said Alfred, as he shook on Carrie's shoulder.

"Ms. Kelley, it's time to go up to your room. You have school in a few hours and I will not have you dawdle and be late for class", he continued as Carrie pretended to act as though she was just waking up.

"Alright Alfred alright, let a girl stretch a moment", Carrie said, in a pretend raspy tired voice stretching out her arms and legs.

"You did plenty of that before training and I graciously allowed you to stay in the cave, because you promised that when Master Bruce returned home you'd go up to your room" said Alfred, in his proper lecturing tone.

"You're right Alfred. Fine, I'll head up. I know when to choose my battles. Boss, glad to see you made it back okay", she said, smiling at Bruce as she made her way back up to the manor.

"Have a good day at school Carrie. And since it's Friday why don't you spend some time with your friends", said Bruce in a calm, tired tone.

"Are you sure? Don't you need help looking through the CCTV footage to find our killer", Carrie asked, confused as though wanting Bruce to change his mind.

"I appreciate it, but it's boring and there's more to life outside this cave. Go enjoy time with your friends and when I find something you won't be kept in the dark", Bruce smiled, in a warm assuring tone.

"Okay, but you better call me the moment we got something, no way I'm missing out when asses need to be handed", said Carrie, in an enthusiastic excitable tone clapping her fist into her other hand.

"Language Ms. Kelley", said Alfred, in his best offended proper English tone.

"I promise Carrie and just remember something", said Bruce, looking Carrie in the eyes as she looks back with intent paying clear attention to the advice Bruce was about to give. "It's not about hurting criminals. What we do. It's about saving as many lives as we are able. We do only what we need to defend ourselves. Now go get some sleep and I'll see you back here when you're done with your friends", said Bruce, in a fatherly tone as he turned to his computer and began working.

Carrie headed back up to the manor, but Bruce noticed Alfred staying behind as he opened his mouth to speak.

"Master Bruce", Alfred paused, though thinking through what he's about to say next. "Master Bruce, I just wanted to say. That I am proud of you. The way you have been with Ms. Kelley. It truly speaks volumes how far you've come. That's all I wished to say", Alfred continued, with a look as a father looked upon his son with pride before following behind Carrie up the manor.

"Thanks Alfred, things this time will be different", said Bruce as though making a promise. "I'll make sure they are", Bruce said to himself as he sat down in his computer seat turning the chair to look upon the screen lying back.

Bruce took a moment to ponder on his method of mentoring Carrie. He knew he couldn't train her the same way as Dick or Barbara. He learned from his mistakes and never wanted to repeat what happened with Jason. Losing one protege, losing the trust of another, and another ending up crippled. Taking on Carrie in a warmer and patient, but still strict method may be what separates her and the others. He knew this time had to be different so he didn't fail another soldier, another friend, and more importantly another member of his family. The mission isn't about vengeance anymore, but about protecting those you care for and the bystanders who never deserved to be caught in the shadow of crime. Bruce then began getting to work on scrubbing the footage to find the accident and put a face to this new killer in Gotham. With the advanced systems of the bat-computer it only took minutes to find the motion alarm that contained the crash. Bruce watched the whole thing unfold as the victims vehicle came from down the road towards the Penguins vehicle. The Penguins men attempted to swerve out of the way but at full speed Colleen Smith's vehicle maneuvered to crash head first into the front passengers side of the vehicle. The killer who was a light-blonde haired man, with a strong physique in a black suit opened the drivers side door stepping out seeming as though completely unaffected by the crash. Bruce got a clear shot of the killer's face getting a scan. Before applying the scan to the facial identification software, he observes how the heist unfolds. The killer pulls out a knife approaching the vehicle checking the passengers side. He looks up at the camera, but appears to not care about being seen before disappearing behind the vehicle. Suddenly, flashes could be seen coming from inside the vehicle. The driver side door swings open as the driver falls out onto the ground landing on his stomach before turning on his back brandishing a pistol firing into the vehicle towards the passengers side. He then turned on his stomach trying to get to his feet, while simultaneously the vehicle's back doors swung open as another one of Penguins men tumbled out of the van onto the ground bleeding from his head.

The killer comes from around the vehicle standing above the injured man. The killer reaches down grabbing the man by his hair, lifting his head and slitting his throat ear to ear before throwing his head back down. After killing the man the killer makes his way towards the driver as flashes from the drivers gun as he shoots at the killer. Bruce noticed the killer never stopped or hesitated as it seemed not a single bullet appeared to hit its mark, but then he looked closer. He observed the distance and the weapons trajectory of fire. The shots definitely hit the killer but the killer was completely unaffected. The driver ran out of ammo and was completely helpless, unable to run away due to his injuries from the crash. Bruce observed the killer's casual demeanor as he got on top of the driver and stabbed him to death. Once he was finished the killer got up and made his way to the back of the van grabbing four briefcases of Penguins money carrying two in each hand and walking away from the crime scene. Bruce took a few moments to ponder on what he observed as it didn't make a lot of sense. A suspected killer who has murdered random people he meets on a dating app, somehow figures out where Penguin was getting his money out of the city, doesn't try to conceal his identity, and only takes enough money for a certain purpose. Bruce took the facial scan and downloaded it into his identification program. It only took a few moments before he got a match. Bruce read every detail of the killer's profile. Name: Craig Bellman. Age: 37. Occupation: Defense attorney. Marital Status: Divorced. And a missing persons case popped up stating he's been missing for a week. Everything about this man all wrapped up nicely and neat. Far too neat and Bruce got a bad feeling this may be another unique case like Mad Hatter, Mr. Freeze, or god forbid Joker. Batman put on his cowl and went over to the bat jet getting it primed and ready to fly as Alfred returned to the cave.

"I take it you've already got a lead on this case", he asked curiously.

"It's too clean Alfred. It only took minutes getting everything I needed to find and catch this person", said Bruce, as though what he was observing was a complete fabrication, but yet the evidence was clear on the screen.

"I take it there is much more to this than what's being presented in front of you", Alfred said, curious but also concerned as to what could possibly be running through Bruce's head that would make him uneasy about the information he was given.

"It's too perfect, Alfred. Too easy. Let Carrie know that if she needs me to use the bat phone. I'm going out", said Batman as the bat jet roared as the bottom of the aircraft opened, lowering a pilot seat.

Batman entered the pilot seat and it rose back up automatically. Batman entered the coordinates to Craig Bellman's address then the jet engines roared again and the bat jet took off. It didn't take much time for the bat jet to arrive at the assigned location since it was in one of the suburbs outside the city limits. When he arrived Batman hit a button opening a side door of the bat jet. Batman left the jet on autopilot so it simply hovered two hundred feet above Craig's home. Batman got up from the pilot seat and then dived out of the bat jet opening his cape triggering the glide mechanism opening his cape like wings allowing him to glide to the ground

safely as he landed in front of the house. Batman made his way to the front door finding it locked. He pulled a lock pick from his belt as he made quick work opening the front door. Batman entered the house activating his augmented vision lenses searching for anything that may look out of the ordinary whether it was toppled furniture, signs of going on the run, anything that might give him a clue as to how Craig Bellman, a small time defense attorney with no criminal background becomes a murderer on traffic cam footage. A man with no recorded combat training of any kind and yet killed three armed thugs like it was a routine stroll at the park. No hesitation. Not even the slightest flinch when those muzzle flashes went off. Completely undeterred by the thought of being harmed. Not to mention not even a single sign of injury nor hindrance from a head on collision. None of it made sense. Batman then made his way to the garage. When he entered his lenses picked up a mass amount of blood residue all over the garage floor. Batman searched for any specks of blood, hair, skin, anything for a DNA test to find out who was attacked in this garage. It took awhile but he found a couple small droplets of blood. Batman pulled out a small scalpel and vile from his utility belt collecting the blood sample into the vile and then sealed it. He exited the house as the bat jet lowered itself in the cul de sac for him to get back in the pilot seat then it lifted up and took off.

Later that morning Gordon arrived at the GCPD entering his office with coffee in hand. Before he had a chance to sit down he noticed a sealed silver bag on his desk. When he opened it the bag contained a vile and a usb. He immediately knew what to do as he stepped out of his office.

“Montoya contact forensics! Let them know we got something”, he shouted.

Chapter 6: The Moment

It was a quiet morning at Arkham Asylum. Everything was routine from the shift changes to scheduling the daily therapy sessions for the inmates. Breakfast was being served to all sections of the asylum. A security guard made his way into the solitary confinement sector pushing the breakfast cart. The guard was walking through the gray dimly lit concrete hall before he made it to a cell with the name “Jane Doe” on the front of it.

“Alright Jane, it's French toast day. I know it's your favorite”, said the guard opening up a slot in the door and putting the food in the slot and slipping it back on the inmates side. There was silence in the cell until a voice could be heard.

“Thank you officer”, said a quiet raspy female voice in a tired but thankful tone.

As the officer walks away from Jane's cell he mutters under his breath.

“Dammit”.

After school, Carrie and Michelle went to gymnastics practice together. Michelle wore her black sparkly leotard, while Carrie put on her leotard which was red, yellow, and green. The girls

made their way to the spring floor along with a dozen other girls. The room was massive full of gymnastics equipment with multiple balance beams, high bars and gym bars. The gym coach was a tall athletic woman in her early forties with her brunette hair in a ponytail, had them start the class with leg conditioning before having half the girls practice their routines, while instructing the others to practice their balance on the balance beam. Michelle was told to come up to the spring floor and show the coach her routine.

“Michelle you’re up girlie! Show us what you got so far”, the coach in an excitable enthusiastic tone as Carrie and the other girls cheered her on.

Michelle got to her position on the spring floor as she took a few deep breaths clearing her mind to focus. The music started as a soft rock and pop remix. She moved with the rhythm with every step and flip. Half way through the routine she tried getting a running start before a combination of flips, but somehow the top of her foot caught the floor making her fall face first into the spring floor. The coach and Carrie rushed to her aid as hitting her face rocked her a bit. The girls quietly chatted amongst themselves as The coach spoke.

“Michelle you okay? Carrie please help me get her up”, she said in a worried but disappointed tone moving quickly to Michelle. As Carrie is already moving ahead of her.

“Already a step ahead of you Coach Myers. Michelle it’ll be okay we got you”, Carrie said helping the coach get Michelle back to her feet.

“I appreciate it but I’m fine, just a bad fall I’ll be alright”, Michelle said, as Coach Myers and Carrie helped her up.

“Well, up until the end you did great. Just mind your footing next time you know what you’re doing”, said the coach in a supportive caring tone.

“Thanks Coach Myers”, said Michelle trying to keep her head up doing her best to not let her screw up get the best of her.

“Carrie once we get Michelle seated you’re up next”, Coach Myers said as she and Carrie gently seated Michelle with the other girls.

Once she was done helping her friend, Carrie moved quickly back onto the spring floor to begin her routine. Carrie focused her mind on every move she was about to make. Just as though she’s plotting out every planned strike and attack she’d make on an enemy during a raid alongside Batman. The music began to play with a remix using rap and rock n roll. Carrie moved and danced with pure grace on every step, every flip, and jump using her powerful legs. Carrie used the additional training with Batman to maintain all her focus to complete the routine flawlessly as to make a mistake on a mission could mean death. For ninety seconds, everyone in the gym was in awe. Once the routine was finished all the girls cheered and applauded as Coach Myers began clapping along with the rest of the gymnasts. Carrie couldn’t help having a

wide smile on her face as she took her bow. After gym practice Carrie and Michelle got into their regular clothes.

"You were incredible today Carrie! You blew everyone's mind", Michelle said proudly while putting on her shirt.

"Thanks, I was worried that the coach wouldn't like the choreography", said Carrie happily putting on her shoes.

"I don't know how you do it", said Michelle, with a tone of self-disappointment and a bit of envy.

"What do you mean", Carrie asked, curiously as she noticed her friend's tone of voice.

"Between school, your job, and your other activities. I don't know how you manage to keep up with your grades as well as your skills. I can barely balance half of what you do", Michelle said, sounding more discouraged.

"Hey, you stumbled a bit today. Doesn't mean you can't make it better next time, right. You're amazing with what you do and Coach Myers see's it. My boss just happens to be a good trainer and helps me where I struggle. Whether it's dealing with the fact my family is the dumpster fire that it is or learning how to keep my focus when performing a routine", said Carrie sitting close to Michelle putting her hand on her shoulder.

"He sounds like a wonderful person", said Michelle trying to get out of her funk.

"He's the best, if it weren't for him.....well I'm thankful for him regardless whatever he has me do. It's hard work but I wouldn't change it for anything. If there's ever time I'll teach you a bit of what he shows me", said Carrie, smiling looking down at the floor as though reflecting on her own words. Can she ever share her secret? Would it even be safe to do so? The questions swirled in her head, but she did her best to not show a sign of concern, as she looked back up to Michelle.

"I'd like that thanks. You're going to have to introduce me sooner or later, you know. You can't keep him a secret forever", said Michelle cracking a small smile as though slowly coming out of her discouragement.

"Nah, sooner or later you'll meet him. Now let's get out of here. I'm sure our ride is waiting and we have a night of fun ahead of us", said Carrie, enthusiastically pulling Michelle to her feet and rushing her out of the girls locker room.

Michelle's brother's vehicle was waiting for them outside the gym. Carrie noticed a young beautiful woman who looked skinny, with fair skin and brunette hair sitting in the passenger seat right as they're entering the car. Michelle's brother looked at them smiling.

“Hey, ladies, I hope you both had a good practice”, he said excitedly.

“I tumbled a bit during my routine, but other than that it was fine. Carrie was the real star today”, Michelle said, happily.

“Don’t leave us in suspense Lucas who’s your lady friend”, asked Carrie curiously.

“Hello there! My name is Crystal! Hope you don’t mind me tagging me along but your brother insisted and I couldn’t say no. He was like a puppy, his begging was so cute”, said Crystal smiling and giggling, sticking her hand out to shake hands with the girls.

“Crystal and I have been talking online for a bit and we both agreed tonight would be perfect for a first date”, Lucas said enthusiastically smiling at Crystal.

“Well it’s nice to meet you Crystal, glad you can join us tonight. Considering you’ve been talking online I take it you met on an app”, smiled Michelle trying to be supportive for her brother.

“We met on the Twotogether app yeah”, said Lucas, nonchalantly.

“Well, can’t go wrong at the Gotham Pier. No better way to impress a lady huh Lucas. Be sure to bribe the carnie, so you don’t look like a chump trying to win her prize”, said Carrie, sarcastically trying to poke and get a rise out of Lucas .

“Come on Carrie, your personality is the only prize we need this evening”, said Lucas smiling at Carrie through the rearview mirror.

“Hey, Crystal do us all a favor and pretend all his dad jokes are funny, so he doesn’t realize he’s a comedic hack”, sassied Carrie smirking back at Lucas.

“You know Carrie, one of these days I’m going to toss your skinny ass out a window and you’re never going to see it coming”, said Lucas clapping back at Carrie.

“Oh Lucas, your big ass would have to catch me first”, said Carrie in a joking playful way allowing herself to have fun and be normal.

“Okay, that’s enough, both of you. Carrie, stop being a little sister in front of Crystal. And Lucas act your age there’s a lady out of your league present”, said Michelle firmly as though almost motherly.

They all giggled as they made their way to Gotham pier. While they were driving Carrie could see the bat-signal in the sky and even though she was having fun with her friends. The flashes of Raymon killing Marco still haunted her mind. The guilt of failure lingering even though she

caught him, she didn't stop him. She caught her hand in her pocket holding the bat-phone. The thought of Batman working and fighting while she was enjoying herself. It didn't seem right at all. It wasn't fair. She got trusted with his secret identity and made her his partner. He's been more of a parental figure than her own parents could ever hope to be. Her smile began to disappear. She almost started sulking in her seat, but then she remembered something. What Bruce told her.

"Go enjoy time with your friends and when I find something you won't be kept in the dark".

His warm smile came into her mind and she let go of the bat-phone in her pocket. She began again participating in the conversations with her friends. She realized it was okay to have fun at least just for tonight. Life can't always be about the mission. That was the whole point of Bruce letting her be where she is now.

Sometime Later at the GCPD...

The bat-signal flashes high in the sky. Gordon is standing on the roof of the GCPD waiting holding a light brown file under his armpit as he pulls out his pipe from his coat pocket. He puts some tobacco in the pipe before lighting it, taking a few puffs of the tobacco.

"Hello Jim", a voice said in an augmented tone speaking from a voice modifier.

Gordon nearly leaped out of his shoes never expecting when Batman is going to appear let alone speak though after they've known each other for as long as they have he'd thought he'd be used to it. He turns around looking up to see Batman perched on top of the roof entrance. White augmented eyes coming from the mask starring as though through him.

"Batman. We viewed the footage you sent us and conducted testing on the droplet sample and what we've learned", Gordon paused to take another puff of tobacco. "That the blood belonged to the perp we watched on those traffic cams", continued Gordon in a cold concerned tone. The feeling that this case was going to be worse than abnormal.

"Craig Bellman's blood", said Batman curiously.

"I figured you ran tests of your own", asked Gordon, also curious but couldn't shake the worry in his voice.

"It never hurts to get a second opinion", said Batman as though acknowledging Gordon's concerns.

"Unfortunately, for us it's nothing really to go off of. Not unless you already went to Arkham. You and I only know of one person who murders their victims and pretty much wears their identity and lives their lives", said Gordon, as though some part of him wishes that it would be that simple. That for this case the answer was simply right in front of them.

“Yes.....It isn't her. I made sure. Jane Doe is still in her cell. I checked myself. There's something we're missing. Until a pattern presents itself it'll be difficult to determine what our suspect does next or who will be next”, said Batman still in his stoic tone.

“First a woman who is thrown from the Gotham overlook. Then three of the Penguins goons killed and half of his financial transfer stolen leaving millions still in the van. So far it doesn't make sense. Colleen Smith wasn't even associated with Penguin or any of the men that were killed”, said Gordon frustrated as looking at a puzzle with missing pieces.

“I don't like it either Jim. For now we will just have to hold steady and be patient. I did some digging. In the past few weeks, there have been several murder/disappearance cases between Gotham and Bludhaven. Victims have been both male and female”, said Batman as he looked upon the city. “Seems to me a serial killer has made their way to Gotham from Bludhaven, but for now that's an assumption until I can get harder evidence to prove it”, Batman continued.

“Gotham. Just when you think we have a handle on things. All the big bads are put away. There always seems to be a calm before the storm. Then next thing you know Jokers back or Bane invades. Rinse and repeat. I just pray that whatever this is, we take care of it, before too many more citizens are hurt or worse”, said Gordon looking the same direction as Batman puffing more tobacco as looks up on the perch to see Batman had disappeared.

Back at Gotham Pier Carrie and Michelle are having the time of their lives going on the rides, escaping the elaborate Haunted House of Mirrors, Carrie using her newly trained skills to win every carnival game she plays. As she stuffed all her winnings in a large black plastic bag provided by the carnie at one of the games. Michelle turned her head glaring at all the colored lights flashing, the people smiling and laughing, until someone caught her eye and she started blushing. Right as she did this, Carrie noticed and looked in the direction Michelle turned away from noticing a boy from school. Her eyebrow raised as a mischievous smile came over her face.

“Is that Liam Caldwell over there”, she said in a snarky sarcastic tone. “Oh and there's no one clamoring to his shoulder either. If I were to guess I'd say he only came with his guy friends”, she continued acting as the angel and devil on Michelle's shoulder.

“Shut up Carrie. Don't even start”, Michelle said embarrassed.

“Hey, look he's cute you're cute. He ain't dating Katie Blanch anymore last I checked. So if I were you I'd stop being a blushing deer in the headlights. And seize your moment. Grab that bull by the horns girlie”, said Carrie pushing Michelle in Liam's direction.

Michelle awkwardly made her approach to Liam as he played a ring toss carnival game. Her stomach tightened the closer she got to him until she blinked and suddenly found herself next to him. She struggled to get a simple “Hello” to pass her lips as he turned his head to look at her.

She saw a sweet smile come across his face. Liam was tall and lanky, with a handsome face, with long blond hair that almost passed his neck, his eyes always appeared tired.

“Hello there, care to join me? Maybe having you here will help me have a little luck with this game”, Liam said pleasantly.

“Sure I’d be happy to hangout for a bit”, Michelle said, almost stunned with excitement as she turned her head to look at Carrie with a shocked look on her face as Carrie smiled giving her two thumbs up.

Carrie retained her smile, proud of her friend for beginning to come out of her shell. Carrie in brief periods liked the idea of having a relationship with someone special, but right now she has what she considers more important things going on. She has a responsibility to herself to get stronger to back up Batman and be someone who can help Gotham be a bit better. When she’s ready she will figure out the balance needed to live the double life she’s working towards. For now, this experience with her friend is enough. After some time went by Lucas and Crystal found Carrie and approached her. Carrie noticed Crystal holding a stuffed animal and she looked over at Lucas.

“I take it the carnie accepted your bribe”, smirked Carrie in a smug tone.

“If only that were true. I won it, the poor guy needed someone to redeem him, he tried so hard I couldn’t let it be in vain”, giggled Crystal putting her arm around an embarrassed Lucas.

“What did I do to you jackasses to catch so much shade”, said Lucas jokingly.

“It’s all in love big fella”, giggled Carrie as Michelle approached the group excitedly.

“Carrie Carrie Carrie”, Michelle said, flashing her phone in front of Carrie's face rapidly as Carrie tried to read what was on the screen.

“You got his number”, Carrie exclaimed happily.

“I know”, Michelle exclaimed, almost shrieking, grabbing both of Carrie's shoulders.

“Alright alright let’s head out of here. Carrie you spending the night”, Lucas asked, smirking at the girl's excitement.

“You bet your ass I am”, she said, turning to Lucas smiling.

“Cool, alright ladies get out of here”, he said loudly as the noises of the rides, games, and people blared around them.

Carrie grabs her back pack as she and the gang make their way back to Michelle's house. When they entered the house there were two guys around Lucas' age sitting on the couch in front of their flat screen watching a movie.

"Hey shitheads, I brought someone over so be respectful", said Lucas jokingly to the men on the couch.

One of the men was a shorter guy, bald, with dark skin only a few inches taller than Carrie, got up from the couch and walked over to shake Crystal's hand.

"Nice to meet you, I'm Henry", said Henry in a friendly tone smiling.

"The other guy too lazy to move is Brice", said Lucas in a nonchalant tone.

Brice, who was a larger guy, easily bigger and taller than Lucas with olive skin and curly dark hair effortlessly raised his arm and spoke.

"What's up, cool to have you", he said in an uncaring seemingly bored tone.

"Pleasure to meet you guys, are you going to join us for movie time", Crystal happily asked curiously.

"No, I think they have their own thing they'll be doing right guys", said Lucas giving the guys a look as though wanting them to give an excuse to leave.

"We got nothing happening right now we're good to join you", said Brice smiling smugly giving Lucas a return look that he's staying put.

"While you all figure it out Carrie and I are going to my room. Later y'all", said Michelle in a jokey tone as she grabs Carrie's hand practically dragging her towards her room.

The girls enter Michelle's room as Michelle shuts the door behind them while Carrie lays her back pack on Michelle's computer desk chair.

"I know they're adults, but sometimes I question", said Michelle jokingly as she makes her way to her bed and falls back staring at the ceiling.

"Yes, they can be goofy, but they're cool and deep down you love them", said Carrie as she sits on the bed next to Michelle. "Well, maybe not Brice", she continued.

"You're right. I hope we're all able to remain close as we get older", Michelle said, staring up at the ceiling seemingly lost in thought. "Honestly, all I want is more nights like this where we can have fun. Goof off. Act our age. Not always worrying about screwing up a routine or getting good enough grades to go to college", she continued.

"Sounds like someone is drifting in the clouds tonight. Getting Liam's number wouldn't have anything to do with that? Would it", asked Carrie, smiling playfully looking at Michelle with her eyebrow raised.

"That was just a bonus and sure I might still be riding that high a little bit. I don't know. Just promise that no matter how busy we may get. We make time to keep the friendship strong", Michelle said, lifting herself up smiling. "And Carrie, if you can't stay with your boss you are always welcome with me and Lucas. I mean we've been doing that forever considering how your parents are", she continued.

There was a pause as Carrie let the words of her friend sink in. She could feel a tear start to form. She didn't know how to fully express her appreciation for Michelle. And thoughts began to race through her head as she thought about where she would be without Michelle or Bruce. It never truly sank in what her situation has become. No longer neglected. No longer forgotten. She feels like she truly exists with meaning to her life. Carrie gave Michelle a hug.

"Will you stop being your sweet self for a moment. I don't like getting teary eyed", she said, hugging Michelle before letting her go. "I appreciate your words. And I am okay. My boss takes good care of me in his own special way. But our friendship isn't something you'll have to worry about. Now before this gets any more soap opera-esque slash teen-drama can we please watch something stupid online", she said, almost giggling.

"Absolutely we can", said Michelle as they both pulled out their phones and started sharing videos with each other laughing.

Hours went by and the moon was high in the black Gotham sky. Michelle woke up from her sleep needing to use the restroom. She dragged herself out of bed making her way to her door still half asleep. As she began making her way to the restroom, even dazed, she noticed the living room was still dimly lit by the television and a clacking noise was coming from somewhere out of sight. She made it to the restroom not thinking much of the noise. As she sat down she could still hear the clacking. She couldn't make out what the noise could be, but it's not something she'd ever heard in her house before. After urinating and washing her hands she could still hear the clacking. When she stepped out of the restroom and started making her way to the living room where the sound was getting louder. She could strangely feel a vibration coming from the ground every time the clacking was heard. When she finally was able to look over the couch everything stopped. Time stopped. Sound stopped. Her body went numb and the hairs on her arms stood up out of pure terror. Adrenaline was beginning to rush throughout her body making her hands and knees shake. Her mind was trying to process what was in front of her. The clacking stopped. Now a pair of cold empty eyes met with Michelle's as though she was staring into nothing. Crystal holding a silver and black claw hammer completely caked in blood and viscera, on her knees hovering over Lucas' body as his skull was shattered and brain smashed. Pieces of skull and brain matter practically floating in a pool of his blood as Crystal continued to stare at Michelle. Time felt infinite as Michelle tried to gather herself enough to run

and scream. To alert everyone else in the house before Crystal strikes. Like trying to break out of a concrete full body caste Michelle sees Crystal start to slowly get back to her feet. She started moving towards Michelle and was getting closer. Move, hurry up and move Michelle thought to herself as every step got closer and closer. Michelle just needed to scream and move her feet. She knows she'll be next if she doesn't move. Crystal was almost around the couch beginning to raise the bloody claw hammer. Michelle finally mustered every ounce of will power and strength to let out the loudest blood curdling scream she could muster.

"HEEEEEELP!!!! SHE KILLED HIM!!! HELP ME PLEEEEAASSEE!!! SHE KILLED LUCAS".

Crystal started making her way towards Michelle as Michelle finally was able to make herself move and run towards her room sprinting down the hall. A nearby bedroom door opened and Brice came out the door holding a baseball bat when Michelle suddenly smacked into him as she tried sprinting to her bedroom.

"MICHELLE!! WHAT THE FUCK", he bellowed as he turned his head as pure horror came over him as Crystal covered in blood was nearly right in front of him.

He tried to swing his bat at Crystal but her reflexes were too quick with inhuman strength grabbing the bat in mid-swing stopping it completely as her grip rips the bat from his hands. Before Brice knew it even with his large frame Crystal pushed him up against the hallway wall as she started smashing his head in with the hammer. Blood started pouring from Brice's head as another nearby door swung open. Michelle was crying and screaming at the sight of Crystal killing Brice as a gunshot was fired at Crystal as Henry stood above her yelling.

"MICHELLE GET TO YOUR ROOM AND CALL 911 GO"!!!

Michelle rushed to get back to the room getting a glimpse of Crystal continuing to bash in Brice's skull as Henry screamed at her to stop before firing multiple rounds from his 9mm pistol but it didn't seem to have any effect. As Michelle made it into the room slamming the door shut she turned around to see Carrie holding a phone that she never saw before. The phone flickered brightly flashing a Batman insignia that she recognized before Carrie put the phone in her pocket grabbing her slingshot and a couple of white colored pellets. Carrie then rushed over to help bar the door and keep it shut from Crystal as she spoke to Michelle who was hyperventilating out of sheer panic.

"Michelle, I know you're terrified. I know you don't understand what's happening and you're panicking. I don't know what's happening either, but I called my boss. Batman. Batman's coming to help us. We just have to hold on and figure a way out of this until he gets here. Just hang on Michelle, stay strong and I'll protect you", said Carrie as she does her best to calm Michelle despite the gunshots still going off in the hallway. Trying to keep her own composure. This is what all her training was for. This is the moment to utilize everything she learned to protect her friend.

They could still hear struggling in the hallway as two more shots were fired, but then silence. A few moments of silence before the girls could hear footsteps making their way to their door.

“Michelle, you need to tell me who’s out there and what is happening. Take a minute to catch your breath and tell me everything you can”, Carrie said, holding her weight against the door loading her slingshot with one of the white pellets keeping her calm demeanor.

Michelle started crying as she couldn’t keep it together. She was collapsing no matter what Carrie was saying to her as she did her best to get out the words.

“She killed them. She killed Lucas and his friends”, she said, struggling to get the words out, unable to stop crying let alone get the strength to stay on her feet.

Carrie went numb inside. People were dead. People she knew and was close with, her friends were dead. But she can’t afford to crumble. There will be time for that later. All that matters now is survival. The mission before her was clear and that was to get them both out of the house and away from their attacker. BANG! There was a loud strike against the bedroom door as Carrie grabbed Michelle moving her away from the door before another loud strike.

“Michelle! Get your shit together and open the window I’ll hold them back”, shouted Carrie as she aimed her slingshot at the door pulling the sling back.

Michelle was still unable to get to her feet as she cried and screamed, still relentlessly traumatized by the sight of her brothers bludgeoned, beaten skull. The door was cracking and crumbling as Carrie knew her friend was too broken in the moment to help. She moved over to the window and unlocked it as the door was smashed inward as splintered wood littered the floor. Carrie using her quick reflexes fired the slingshot toward the pursuer seeing a puff of white smoke hit its mark. Her moment of relief was, but a flicker almost immediately dread came over her. The body that hit the floor was the bloody bludgeoned corpse of Henry as his body was used to cave in the door and also take the shot of the knockout pellet. Carrie quickly loaded another shot and fired, but Crystal’s reflexes were very quick, catching the pellet in her hand crushing it as white smoke flared from her hand. Crystal charged at them, but Carrie was quicker running towards her assailant, suddenly using a single leg drop kick on her shin making her lose her balance falling head first smashing into the nightstand by the bed. Carrie quickly moved, grabbing Michelle getting her up and moving her out of the room before Crystal, as though unharmed, got up immediately grabbing Michelle’s arm pulling her towards her while taking a swing with the claw hammer at Carrie who dodged the attack. Crystal then shoved Michelle out of the room hard, making her smash against the hallway wall leaving cracks and damage as she collapsed to the ground out with the wind knocked out of her. Carrie and Crystal battled it out with Carrie focusing on Bruce’s advice to use the power in her legs as her means of attack while her arms are used for defense. Though Crystal was inhumanly strong taking insane amounts of punishment by Carrie’s kicks, agility, and combination of martial arts mixed with gymnastics, one thing was clear. Carrie was showing signs of getting tired while Crystal

even with taking shot after shot to the head and body showed no sign of injury or fatigue. Michelle gained enough composure to notice Henry's pistol nearby as she crawled her way over to the gun. Carrie was doing her best to hang on, using every move she learned in her arsenal. Using the confined environment to her advantage, beating on Crystal every chance she could with every opening she observed. She went in for another kick as Crystal raised the hammer but it was a bluff. Crystal caught Carrie's leg and almost effortlessly swung Carrie off the ground, smashing her whole body into the bedroom wall hard enough to create a crater. Carrie fell from the wall covered in paint chips and splintered wood hitting the bed gasping for air having the wind knocked out of her. Crystal grabbed her leg aggressively pulling her off the bed raising the claw hammer. Carrie's heart began to race a mile a minute as panic started to set in. Crystal's grip was too strong, she wasn't going to survive long enough for Batman to save her. She was never going to get to fight beside Batman as Robin. She was never going to grow up and see tomorrow. So many thoughts running through her mind all came to one conclusion. This may be it, but at least she'll go down swinging like any good Robin would. Carrie swung her fists and scratched at Crystal's arm who didn't seem to feel any of it, before Carrie realized what happened. BANG! BANG! BANG! Three gunshots went off. First shot seemed to miss but the second burst through Crystal's chest and the third went clear through her forehead. Crystal collapsed to the ground and Carrie saw Michelle standing in the doorway. Still aiming the gun at Crystal's body repeatedly pulling the trigger trying to continuously shoot the monster who killed her brother. She leaned against the doorway frame slowly collapsing, unable to keep her composure anymore. Carrie, though injured from the fight, limped to her friend to comfort her.

"It's going to be okay. You did it Michelle. You got her. She can't hurt anyone anymore. Thank you for saving me", Carrie said, holding Michelle tightly as Michelle cried in her arms. "Come on, let's get out of here. Help will be here soon I promise", she continued slowly raising her friend up and as they were about to head for the front door of the house they heard movement.

Their hearts started pumping rapidly as despair came over the girls as they saw Crystal get back to her feet and turned around to show that the bullet holes were gone. She stared at them with cold hatred at first before a small smirk came upon her face at the sight of pure terror that came upon Carrie and Michelle. Before anyone could blink Crystal took her claw hammer and threw it as a loud crack was heard when it came into contact with Michelle's forehead. Blood trickled down from the wound and Michelle was unconscious before hitting the floor. Carrie, too tired to keep her on her feet, collapsed with her. They both hit the floor simultaneously, but despite her exhaustion Carrie tried to get back up and drag Michelle with her towards the front door. It was in vain and even though she didn't want to admit it they weren't getting away as Crystal was about to move towards them. She looked into Crystal's cold empty eyes though terrified not understanding how this person isn't dead. Carrie tried to ignore the fear flowing through her mind, but it's clear as the blue in her eyes that there is no winning this fight. Then another thought came into her head. One last ditch effort to survive. She reached her hand into her pajama pocket grabbing a white pellet and prepared for her last charge getting back to her feet. Crystal looked unimpressed as she didn't move a muscle to prepare for Carrie's assault. With every ounce of strength she had left, Carrie moved as fast as she could, but before she could execute her attack. Crystal was faster and had her hand wrapped around Carrie's throat

lifting her off the ground. Carrie still didn't waste a moment smashing the white pellet in Crystal's face as a white cloud of smoke engulfed the killer's face. The wait was endless as Carrie anticipated for Crystal's grip to loosen, but it didn't, the smoke had no effect. For the first time during this entire encounter Crystal opened her mouth to speak.

"I do apologize for ruining your night. You put up a pretty good fight kid. You should be proud of yourself. Don't worry I won't kill you yet. You were too much fun for that and would rather enjoy another round you and to make things a little sweeter. I'll have given you the motivation to try harder next time", she said in an empty monotone voice.

Before Carrie had a moment to process what she just heard, in one sudden lightning fast movement Crystal headbutted Carrie's face, as a wave of pain and heat came from her nose as she felt blood pour from her nose. Crystal tossed Carrie hard out the bedroom window as she landed flat on her back sliding across the grass. The fight was over. She had lost. Her head was throbbing and bleeding as she struggled to stay conscious trying desperately to muster up any strength she left in her body as she leaned to see Crystal moving towards where Michelle lay unconscious. She fell back and everything began spinning and going black. She suddenly could hear Michelle regain consciousness screaming and begging to be spared. Carrie could hear her cries, while pleading but after a few seconds nothing. Not another word came from Michelle's mouth as memories flashed into Carrie's mind. Her entire history with her friend flashed before her as tears rolled down her eyes as she went in and out of consciousness. She could hear a car speeding off as neighbors came out of their homes screaming at the vehicle. She blacked out again not knowing for how long as a bright flash of light soared high above her. Before she lost consciousness again the last image she saw was a large shadow of a bat gliding towards her then all she saw was darkness.

Chapter 7: Aftermath

The next afternoon Carrie's head felt like it was smashed in by a truck. She was covered in bruises and swelling around her face, with a cut across her nose. The room appeared blurry when she slowly opened her eyes to the bright hospital room lights. Her hearing was also muffled trying to make out the voices being heard in the room. It all came back to her eventually with her vision clearing seeing two shapes forming into people one was familiar to her taking the shape of Bruce, while the other took the shape of an older woman with graying brown hair in a white lab coat assumingly a doctor. Bruce's voice started to become more clear with Carrie listening closely.

"Try them again Leslie", he said frustrated to the doctor as though not understanding what's being said to him.

"We've tried Mr. Wayne, several times. We have been unable to get a hold of them", expressed Leslie sounding apologetic.

"How can two parents be so damn neglectful when a peer arrives before they do. That doesn't make any sense. I'm going to give the Commissioner a call and start a manhunt for these people if I have to", said Bruce, getting more frustrated.

"That might be best to consider, but don't tell the girl. Not yet. She looks like she's been through enough", said Leslie looking over at Carrie as she froze skin going pale in shock. "Oh my god she's awake! Ms. Kelley, how are you feeling, is there any pain or discomfort", continued Dr. Thompsons with both her and Bruce coming to her side.

"Carrie, are you okay", asked Bruce worriedly.

"My head hurts and is sore all over. I take it my parents haven't arrived yet", Carrie asked with a raspy voice like first waking up in the morning.

"Don't worry about that now. Just focus on feeling better. We will use better pain meds to help you Ms. Kelley", said Dr. Thompsons.

"Carrie, this is Dr. Leslie Thompsons. She's a very close family friend. She's been taking care of you since I brought you in", explained Bruce.

"Bruce has been worried sick about you young lady. Didn't leave your side a single time after he got a chance to get out of his suit", Leslie said, catching Carrie off guard.

"What suit do you mean", asked Carrie, acting confused.

"It's okay Carrie. I told you she's a friend. Leslie knows about who I am and what I do", said Bruce holding Carrie's shoulder assuring her it was okay.

"Even though I don't always agree with the way Bruce does things and the way he involves other young people like yourself. The results for how he's turned Gotham around can not be ignored", said Leslie, with a bit of contempt in her voice, but Carrie could tell almost instantly that Leslie cares very much about Bruce.

"Carrie, while Leslie took care of you and patched you up", Bruce paused, knowing the next thing he was about to say was going to hurt her. "I went to the house", he continued.

"Michelle", shouted Carrie suddenly remembering. "Michelle, what happened to her Bruce", she asked worriedly as tears began to form as though deep in her gut she already knew.

"I'm sorry Carrie", said Bruce, regretfully as a look of sadness came over his face.

Carrie laid back starting to cry as Bruce took her and held her, while Leslie looked down at the hospital floor with a sorrowful look in her eyes, putting her hand on Carrie's shoulders. After a few minutes a nurse entered the room looking nervous.

"Dr. Thompkin's, I'm terribly sorry to disturb you, but the Gotham City Police commissioner is here to speak with Mr. Bruce Wayne and the patient", said the nurse, awkwardly as though not wanting to interrupt anything.

"Tell him he can wait. The poor girl needs some time to rest", said Leslie in a frustrated tone.

"No. No. Bring him in. The sooner this monster is caught. The sooner I'll be able to rest", said Carrie moving Bruce and wiping away the tears trying to be strong despite the tears still flowing.

"Are you sure Carrie", asked Bruce looking at Carrie concerned.

"Yes, Bruce I'm sure", she answered with certainty.

"Okay, you want me to stay, while Leslie gets the commissioner", asked Bruce trying to respect Carrie's decisions.

"No, I can use a moment alone please", she insisted.

"Alright, we will be right back", said Bruce standing up straight and making his way out of the hospital room with Dr. Thompkins.

Carrie looked out the window seeing the beautiful sunny day outside. It almost seemed unfair that she gets to see it after promising Michelle she'd make it. She promised her best friend that she would protect her and she didn't. Despite feeling the stitches around the parts of her body that were sliced or impaled by the glass when the window shattered. Or the injuries she received from fighting Crystal. None of it hurt more than the pain she felt internally knowing neither Michelle, nor her brother, nor her friends, ever saw another beautiful sunny day. Carrie pressed her hands against her face crying feeling guilty. A few moments later Bruce arrived with Gordon right behind him at the entryway of Carrie's room knocking on the door, seeing Carrie who did her best to gather enough composure to speak.

"Come in. I'm ready to talk", she said still in a raspy voice.

"Carrie, this is Commissioner Gordon. He has just a couple questions for you", said Bruce as though hoping this isn't too much for Carrie to deal with.

"Hello Carrie, it's nice to meet you. Call me Jim", Gordon said, extending his hand as Carrie took it and shook hands. "Bruce tells me you're a tough young lady. Considering what you just went through, there are no words. We're all glad you're safe. When you're ready we can get started", expressed Gordon in a comforting tone.

"Thank you Commissioner", said Carrie giving a tiny smile.

“Of course. If it’s alright with you, I’m going to show you a picture Carrie and you tell me if this is the individual that attacked you”, explained Gordon pulling out a file from his leather briefcase, pulling out a light brown folder. Opening it and showing Carrie a photo.

Carrie looked at the photo for a moment when a confused look started to form on her face as she was looking at a photo of Craig Bellman. She shook head and spoke.

“No. The killer was a female”, said Carrie, as she noticed a very concerned look came over Gordon’s and Bruce’s face. “What’s wrong”, she asked with her tone changing to worry.

“Carrie. I think you should start from the beginning. I’m going to pull out a tape recorder. If you feel like you are able, please tell me everything you remember “, said Gordon pulling out a tape recorder and laying by Carrie’s hospital bed pressing play on it.

“Okay. It was late when I woke up to my friend Michelle screaming. I prepared to defend against whoever was attacking once I found out what was going on. Michelle came into the room and we closed it behind us. By this point her brother Lucas was dead and I think Bryce was too. Our last defender Henry had a gun and took shots at the killer”, Carrie paused with a memory flashing into her mind how Michelle shot Crystal twice with no effect. “When he was killed she came for us. I fought the best I could trying to get my friend away, but she was so broken over seeing her brother die all I could do was defend. Retreating would’ve meant her becoming the next victim, which I guess didn’t matter in the end”, Carrie continued as tears started to flow down her cheeks.

“Of course it mattered”, said Gordon, still in his comforting calm tone. “You did what most couldn’t in your situation. You kept fighting. If you want to stop we can stop”, he continued.

“No. I can keep going”, said Carrie, noticing Bruce and Leslie with sad, but proud looks on their faces. “Eventually, I was able to get Michelle out of the room, giving her a chance to run and get help. Instead of running she found Henry’s gun. I almost died. If Michelle didn’t do what she did. Maybe she’d still be here instead of me”, said Carrie, looking down at her bed sheets shamefully.

“Don’t be hard on yourself kid. There’s nothing to feel guilty about. Nothing at all. This Crystal girl, tell me about her”, Gordon asked curiously.

“There are pictures of her on Michelle’s brother’s phone, he met her on a dating app. Twotogether or.....wait Lovefound is what it was called. She seemed normal for the most part. Blonde-hair, skinny, with a pretty face you would never think she could....”, Carrie paused, thinking about what to say next considering Crystal showed super-human abilities. She contemplated whether to tell Gordon or wait and tell Bruce in private.

Bruce and Gordon both observed the changes in Carrie’s facial expression and body language. They both instantly knew something was wrong and wondered what was going

through her head. Then, Carrie glanced at Bruce first. Her eyes made it clear she didn't know if what she's about to say next is the right thing or the wrong.

"You'd never think that a girl like her would commit murder", she said, doing her best to lie, but could tell it wasn't subtle enough since Gordon could tell something was up.

"Carrie. Whatever you saw and experienced I'm not here to judge but to listen. If there was anything else about Crystal you want to tell us I'm ready to hear what you have to say. The whole GCPD wants to catch this person and any vital information would help us out", Gordon said, still retaining a perfectly calm tone.

"I think I'd like to rest on it please", said Carrie, lying back in her bed like she was getting ready to take a nap hoping Gordon will leave so she can talk alone with Bruce.

"Okay Carrie, well whenever you're ready to continue I'll leave my card with Bruce. Feel better young lady and take care of yourself", said Gordon, grabbing the tape recorder pushing the stop button.

Gordon packed all his things and got up to head out the door. He started heading out before he turned to look at Bruce and spoke.

"Mr. Wayne, may you walk me to my car please", Gordon requested in a calm polite tone.

"Of course, Commissioner. Carrie I'll be right back", said Bruce exiting the room looking back at Carrie seeing her nod in agreement reluctantly.

Bruce and Gordon exited the room and started walking down the hallway of the hospital floor. Gordon spoke quietly.

"There's much more she isn't saying. Whatever nightmare she experienced she's not ready to give all the details and I don't blame her. Bruce, I understand you're sponsoring her and you're her friend. I know she will eventually tell you the full details before she tells me, so can I trust you to be forward with me when she does. In the meantime, I'll have officers patrolling the hospital roads and speak with the officers tasked to guard this floor, plus I'm sure our mutual friend will be on the lookout as well ", Gordon asked, in a serious tone looking Bruce dead in the eye before entering the elevator.

"Thank you, Commissioner. There's also another matter I'd like you to look into if you wouldn't mind", asked Bruce, in a calm but stern tone.

"What might that be Mr. Wayne", asked Gordon curiously.

"I don't know if you noticed, but her parents were nowhere in sight. Can you check in and find out why they aren't here to check on their child", he asked, in a calm tone.

"Her parents never arrived to check on their own kid? Were the nurses able to get a hold of them", Gordon asked, as the parent side of him started to get concerned.

"They tried multiple times at home and at their jobs. Voicemails were left and even emails were sent. Not a word", said Bruce, still keeping his calm composure.

"I see. I'll look them up and send a patrol car their way. Thanks for the tip Mr. Wayne", said Gordon entering the elevator and heading down to his car.

Bruce headed back to Carrie's hospital room. When he entered she turned her head to look at him with a sad smile. Bruce closed the door behind him, pulled up a chair, and sat down by her bed to speak with her.

"Okay, I'm listening", he said looking at Carrie with honest intent. Carrie took a deep long breath and spoke.

"Michelle, shot her Bruce. Twice. Once through the chest. And once through the back of the head. I thought Crystal was dead, but now that I'm thinking about it I never saw blood. Not once. I used every ounce of our training on her. No signs of bruising. No injuries. She never got tired. It was like fighting a fleshy robot. And the bullet wounds, they healed instantly. Crystal couldn't be hurt. Or killed. I know I sound crazy, but you have to believe me", said Carrie, as though almost begging. Waiting for Bruce to speak as he got up and walked over to the window to look outside.

Earlier That Morning....

That night not long after Carrie's fight with Crystal Batman returned to Michelle's home for a brief recon after bringing Carrie to the hospital. He knew his friend Dr. Thompkins would take good care of his protege. Batman searched the house finding the corpse of Lucas first and searched for his phone finding it in his pocket. He pulled a silver reflective evidence bag from his utility belt putting the phone inside and then continued searching the house. When he entered the dark hallway leading to the bedrooms he came across Bryce's body, his skull bludgeoned to pieces just like Lucas, blood completely covering his pajama shirt and pants. Batman made it to Michelle's room looking down at the body of a young female assumingly Michelle, who had the back of her head caved in with a pool of blood covering her face. He searched for her phone, but was unable to find it. When he entered the bedroom, he came across the body of Henry. Batman was able to find the phone's of everyone in the house except for Michelle's, which made him question "why".

Back at the Hospital.....

"Of course I believe you", Bruce said, calmly still looking out the window. He turned around looking at Carrie with a comforting smile that told her it'll be okay. "What I need from you Carrie

is to recover. When you do, the suit will be waiting and we will find Michelle's killer together. I had a question about Michelle", said Bruce, walking over to Carrie putting a hand on her shoulder.

"What is it Bruce?", Carrie asked curiously.

"Did she have her phone with her before going to bed", Bruce asked.

"Yes, she did why", Carrie wondered, thinking why would Bruce care about her phone.

"When I investigated the house I didn't see it anywhere. Just wondering if maybe Crystal might have taken it. If so, the question is why", Bruce said, as though he was pondering on a possible threat to Carrie that the killer might try to come and finish the job. "Well, for now, I'll remain here with you until visiting hours are over", said Bruce in a comforting tone.

"Thanks Bruce", smiled Carrie.

Bruce remained with Carrie until visiting hours were over. When he left the hospital a phone call came in from Commissioner Gordon as he pulled out his phone to speak.

"Commissioner, any word on Carrie's parents", he asked curiously.

"I have some bad news Bruce. A couple of my guys went over there and knocked on the apartment door when a smell was coming from the place", said Gordon in a sad tone.

"Oh god", said Bruce, as his stomach tightened knowing what Gordon is going to say next.

"I'm afraid they were both found in their recliners. Appears to be an overdose. My forensics team is going to look into what was in their systems. Is there any family she can live with after she gets out of the hospital", asked Gordon, hoping Bruce has a solution for Carrie.

"No, but she can stay with me. Wouldn't be the first time I've taken in a youth who lost everything", said Bruce, in a sad tone.

"Good, I'm relieved to hear that for her sake. Take care Bruce. If I have anything more for you I'll call you", said Gordon, before hanging up.

Bruce took a moment to find a nearby bench and took a seat. He listened to his surroundings. Cars driving, birds chirping, people walking and talking realizing that eventually he will have to tell Carrie she's an orphan. Bruce's parents died protecting him that night in crime alley where Carrie's died selfishly indulging in their own addictions when they should've been by her side in that hospital room. It was never said out loud, but he knew her relationship with her parents was practically nonexistent. Neglect almost in its purest form. When the time is

right he will tell her and help her in any way he can. After thinking on everything he knew it was time and gave Lucius Fox a call.

“Hello Bruce, how is everything going? I heard about what happened to Carrie through Alfred. Is she going to be okay”, Lucius asked worriedly.

“Physically she’ll be okay. But mentally I understand what she’s going through and it’s not going to be easy. There’s more to it, but discussion for another time. Lucius, I have something for you to look into. Can you please meet me at my office within the hour”, Bruce asked, knowing what Lucius was going to say next.

“Absolutely I’ll do whatever I can with whatever you have for me”, said Lucius, very interested in what Bruce wants him to help with.

“Thanks Lucius, see you soon”, said Bruce in an appreciative tone.

“See you soon Bruce”, Lucius said before hanging up.

Chapter 8: Escape

Wayne Tower, a massive skyscraper with a shining glass W in front of the tower, with twelve gargoyles built around the roof in every direction watching over the city of Gotham. Glass windows that went from the bottom to the top of this incredibly tall building. Lucius Fox Wayne Enterprises CFO entered Bruce’s office as Bruce was at his desk waiting for him.

“Hello, Bruce I take it this isn’t obviously a social call. Could this be perhaps having to do with our special project”, Lucius asked curiously as though he already knew the answer.

Bruce got to his feet holding multiple silver reflective evidence bags, walking over to Lucius shaking his hand before he spoke.

“Always good to see you, Lucius. I need your help using the bat-computer we have here at Wayne Tower to do a little bit of digging into something for me. Just be sure to wear rubber gloves when you handle these”, Bruce said, handing Lucius the reflective evidence bags.

“I take it you confiscated these without GCPD authorization. So, what is it I am digging for exactly”, Lucius asked, taking the bags with a curious tone in his voice.

“Look into the dating apps, check the text messages, and see if there's any possibility to track down the people the victims were talking to. Maybe even track down an IP address. Anything that’ll help us find these people. Also, send a picture of a blonde haired girl named Crystal who

you'll find on the phone in the bag named Lucas. Send it to the GCPD and to news outlets. She's the one responsible for putting Carrie in the hospital", said Bruce, in a concerned tone.

"Of course I will Bruce, but these people we're hunting, should I be concerned about things here in Gotham. I mean, don't get me wrong, as Batman you've beaten and captured every criminal that's caused trouble for our city, but this feels a little bit like Joker might be back or something", Lucius asked worriedly.

"No. It's not him. Believe me, if it was you would've already been informed with everybody else. Truth is, I'm not sure what we are dealing with. Barbara sent me a video not long ago about a small group who burned down Stagg Industries in Bludhaven. It's possible they came here under our noses. And if they are on the warpath with Stagg we need to be prepared. Once I get a handle on everything going on, I'll make a move on Stagg and find out why these people are targeting him specifically", Bruce explained knowing that sooner or later a fight will be at their doorstep.

"Well I'll see what I can do, then get back to you as quickly as possible. If there is something, it won't take long at all", said Lucius confidently.

"I know I can count on you Lucius thank you", said Bruce in an appreciative tone.

"Of course, Bruce and give Carrie and Alfred my best will you", asked Lucius smiling.

"Same to you and your family Lucius", said Bruce before leaving the office

Night fell upon Gotham, but no stars nor night sky could be seen due to the clouds moving in with a light rain sprinkling over Gotham General Hospital. A white van pulled up to the hospital and two individuals got out of the vehicle dressed in green nurses scrubs. Crystal was one of them, teamed up with a man with nicely combed brown hair, with a semi-athletic build, with some facial scruff. Crystal was carrying a black purse on her side, with her blonde hair curled. The pair walked up to the hospital noticing the police patrol approaching as they entered the hospital quickly. They approached the security checkpoint as two security guards noticed one of them, a tall older guard who looked to be in his sixties, in a black uniform wearing a thick black security jacket with patches on the shoulders and spoke.

"Hey, folks, how can we help you tonight?", he asked pleasantly.

"Hi, we're interning here at Gotham General and need a little assistance finding the trauma floors. Can one of you escort us?", the male asked with a smile in a very kind confused tone.

"Yeah, I can show you where to go just follow me", said the tall guard pleasantly.

The trio made their way to the elevators as everywhere they went Crystal and the other guy noticed all the doors and elevators required a keycard as the tall guard used his to call down the elevators.

“So, how’s your night going”, asked the tall guard curiously.

“Not too bad, just getting started. How about yours? My name is Howard by the way”, said the male pleasantly, while Crystal kept silent.

“Nice to meet you Howard! The names Kelvin and I started about an hour ago. Got myself a long eleven more hours to go”, said the tall guard, with the elevator arriving and the three all entered together.

“Yikes, working a twelve huh, I commend you man. Those shifts aren’t ever easy. Am I right Crystal”, said Howard retaining his friendly demeanor looking over to Crystal who remained silent. “Still don’t like nights huh? Forgive her for not adding anything to the conversation she’s not a night person”, Howard continued.

“Nah man, it’s cool Trauma should be on the third floor, so we’ll be up momentarily”, said Kelvin, pleasantly not bothered at all.

“Tell me Kelvin, anything exciting happened here lately”, Howard asked in a curious tone.

“Well, interestingly enough we’re trying to keep our eyes out for anything suspicious since a young lady was brought over earlier for almost being killed by some psychopath. Police are up there now keeping her safe. Can you imagine that? Someone trying to kill a kid? People today are beyond help man”, said Kelvin shaking his head in a disgusted tone.

Howard noticed a cold smirk on Crystal’s face, when they felt the elevator come to a stop and the doors opened on the trauma floor. Crystal pulled out her bloody claw hammer from her purse, before Kelvin could turn around and notice in time. Crystal cracked Kelvin over the head knocking him unconscious. Before he could hit the ground with blood pouring from his head, Howard swiftly caught him then wrapped his arms around Kelvin’s neck, twisting it until a crack was heard.

“No. We’re not doing that. Kills are quick tonight. No indulging”, said Howard quietly as he dragged Kelvin into a nearby restroom.

Crystal then made her way to one side of the trauma floor searching the names on the rooms. Howard exited the bathroom seeing Crystal went one way and deciding to go the other to cover more ground. When he entered his side he could see the officers as a nurse approached him.

“Excuse me, can I ask who you are and where you’re supposed to be”, she questioned in a demanding tone loud enough to get the attention of the two officers with one of them pulling out their radio speaking into it, while the other had her hand hovering over her holstered pistol.

“Ma’am, I do apologize I’m a new intern and would like to...”, Howard was swiftly cut off by the nurse.

“Officers! We have someone who isn’t supposed to be up here! Please remove them from this floor”, the nurse said loudly, making one of the officers speak into the radio clearly calling for backup, as they both drew their weapons.

Howard, a bit shocked by how quick things turned on him, knew the jig was up and swiftly grabbed the nurse with both hands twisting her head around breaking her neck. The two officers began aiming their weapons at Howard screaming at him as Crystal made her way back to Howard's position with her hammer clutched in hand.

“GET DOWN ON THE GROUND! HANDS BEHIND YOUR HEAD! DON’T MAKE US SHOOT YOU”, screamed the officers over each other still aiming their weapons.

Howard simply smiled without any ounce of concern with Crystal approaching closer to Howard’s position. One of the officers noticed the hammer covered in blood in Crystal’s hand not stopping even though being warned.

“LADY YOU TAKE ONE MORE STEP WITH THAT WEAPON AND WE’LL SHOOT”, she screamed, but when she realized Crystal wasn’t going to stop the two officers open fired on the intruders.

Gunshots were going off as Dr. Leslie Thompkins, who was hiding behind one of the nurses stations with her colleagues, snuck her way to Carrie’s room seeing Carrie was already almost dressed and unhooked from her IV grabbing her backpack. The two looked at each other and didn’t even have to speak to know what to do next. Amidst the chaos Carrie, still recovering from her injuries, moved as quickly as she could with Leslie by her side to support her. They made their way down to the end of the floor to an exit door leading down to a staircase that went to the bottom floors. Crystal noticed the pair flee from the floor and despite being shot at, raised her hammer hitting one of the officers on the top of his skull, taking him down to the ground as blood poured from his head. Howard pounced on the other officer grabbing her by the tactical vest and lifting her, throwing her into the ceiling. The officer crashed back down to the floor with debris falling all over her before Howard lifted his foot and stomped on her head. Crystal pursued after the pair quickly, while Howard finished off the officer, then made his way to the elevator. The elevator door opened revealing two hospital police officers and three security guards. One of the officers noticed the bullet holes in Howard’s scrubs as Howard smiled and pounced on the officer attacking everyone in the elevator as the doors closed behind him. Carrie and Leslie moved quickly as they could down the steps to the first floor with Crystal almost right behind them. They exited the staircase trying to flee down the hallway trying to get to the exit of

the hospital when a hand grabbed Leslie by the shoulder, ripping her away from Carrie and throwing her a few feet away. Crystal grabbed Carrie by the throat lifting her off the floor smiling with glee, as Carrie fought her heart out to get away as flashes of that night flooded into her mind. The blood and the screams all ringing in Carrie's ears as tears streamed down her face as she kept fighting and clawing at Crystal's arm that remained still.

"Hello there Carrie. Did you really think I'd let you suffer with survivors' guilt for too long? I simply couldn't resist seeing you again. And that look on your face is precious. I promise, if you hold still it'll be quicker than what I did to Michelle", Crystal said, as her grip was choking Carrie, while making her look again into those cold empty eyes despite the ear to ear grin.

Crystal soaking in the despair on Carrie's face slowly raising the hammer as though nothing in the world can stop her from indulging in this kill. Before Crystal can bring down the hammer a batarang struck the hammer out of Crystal's hand. She was taken completely by surprise as she dropped Carrie swiftly turning to the one who dared interrupt her kill. Batman was standing at the end of the hallway staring Crystal down. She tried to make an attempt to grab the hammer, but before she could flinch an attempt, Batman fired his grappling hook. It hooked into Crystal's shoulder pulling her towards Batman as he leaped into the air with his fist clenched bringing it down pulverizing her face. She crashed to the ground, but she immediately started to get back up. Before she could look up, Batman performed a powerful kick to the side of her face smashing it against the hallway wall. The kick was so powerful that the impact buried half of Crystal's head into the wall. Leslie ran over to Carrie lifting her up to her feet. Leslie tried to move Carrie towards the exit, but felt resistance as Carrie didn't want to leave. This was supposed to be her fight, but there she was retreating letting Batman do all the fighting. Leslie noticed and spoke.

"Carrie. Carrie look at me", Leslie said, turning Carrie's head to her. "Your time will come. I promise you. You'll have your time, but you need to survive long enough for it to happen first. Come on, he's got this handled. My car is out this way I'm going to take you to the manor", Leslie said, supporting Carrie as she nodded in agreement as they continued their escape.

Leslie and Carrie made their way to the exit of the hospital, while Batman, noticing Crystal's deformed face start to reshape itself, grabbed her by her scrubs to speak.

"What are you? And why are you trying to murder that girl", Batman interrogated, with his augmented voice, as Crystal looked up at him fully healed, smiling at him.

"Loose end. Plus, I wanted to see if she still had any fight left in her. And she certainly is a live one! This fight is in your favor Batman, only because I'm dedicated to what I do best. But I won't make things too easy for you", Crystal said, in a calm happy tone.

Batman, not understanding what she means, is suddenly attacked from behind by Howard grabbing him and lifting Batman up above his head. Batman quickly opened his gauntlet revealing a bunch of buttons and a small computer screen. He hit one of the buttons activating a

taser feature in his gloves as a blue light lit up on his palms and fingers. Batman flung his arms back landing his fingers on Howard's face zapping him with electricity making him yell in surprise releasing Batman. Crystal got back to her feet making a run for the hammer, Batman noticed this, but before he could react Howard recovered way faster than anticipated trying to pounce on the vigilante, but Batman roundhouse kicked him, knocking Howard into the ground. Batman's reflexes were extremely quick as he pulled out a bola, spinning it in his hand before throwing it at Crystal with its cable wrapping around her legs taking her to the ground. Within a split second he then immediately turned his attention to Howard who got right back to his feet and appeared unharmed by the kick and impact to the hospital floor. Using multiple precise nerve strikes and punches used on any normal opponent would render them helpless or unconscious with one strike, but these two were beyond anything Batman has ever faced. No matter what he seemed to do to Howard he wouldn't hit the ground again. Batman was striking him harder than he'd ever struck anyone, there was no holding back. Crystal ripped the cable off her legs with ease and was able to rush her way to her hammer grabbing it then went after Carrie and Leslie. Batman tried to make a dash after Crystal, but Howard grabbed his cape holding him back pulling on his cape bringing Batman in close enough to strike him, but Batman dodged it making the attack smash a major hole in the nearby wall. Batman took advantage using his taser gloves with full force smashing his palm against Howard's face. The discharge made Howard release Batman's cape as Howard was struck several more times before Batman pinned him against the wall, while electrical discharge was still coming out of Batman's gloves. Howard displayed signs of pain as his face squinted in anger, but then Batman noticed features in Howard's face change. His eye color, the size and length of his nose, his hair color, even the pigment of his skin. Batman was taken aback briefly, just enough time for Howard to push off the wall using strength beyond the limits of a man his size and delivered a palm strike into Batman's chest hard enough to leave a handprint in his chest armor, making him fly across the hallway as he slammed into the ground knocking the wind out of him. Howard, reforming his normal features moving away from the wall, pulled out a pistol aiming it at Batman's head as he slowly approached him.

"You're pushing your luck Batman. You're almost forcing me to go all out and kill every single person in this hospital. I don't want to do that. This isn't the stage for it. Soon I'll bring a terror, this world has never seen. And I will make history. I'll finally be more than just a man made of nothing. So, give it your best shot to stop me", said Howard, with a cruel smile coming over his face.

Countless sirens can be heard coming from outside the hospital. But Howard kept his complete focus on Batman in case he tried to make a move against him. Howard then backed away still keeping his gun fixed on Batman until he was clear when he saw an escape in his peripheral down an open hallway.

"See you very soon Batman", said Howard, with a look of pure hateful intent contradicting it with a sinister grin.

Howard took off running, moving extremely fast to fast for even Batman to catch up. Batman got back to his feet and looked down the hallway seeing Howard was already out of view noticing many entry points he could've turned to cover his tracks. Batman then made his way towards where Crystal ran after Carrie and Leslie hoping they made it out okay.

Carrie and Leslie were able to make it to the hospital entrance/exit hearing what sounded to be like hundreds of sirens on one side of the hospital as two security guards were talking into a radio. One of them noticed the pair trying to make it out as he moved to block their exit.

"Hey hey, where are you two going this hospital is on lock down until the GCPD can do a full sweep of the place", said the guard sticking his hand out making them stop.

"Young man. It's good you take your job seriously and try to keep us safe. But right now keeping us in here is going to have the complete opposite effect if you don't let us out this door. People are dead and one of the murderers is right behind us", said Leslie, trying to remain calm, but with an angered and frightened tone ready to snap.

"YO! What did she say? I'm out. Fifteen dollars an hour ain't worth this", said the second guard standing straight up and taking off immediately running out the entrance.

"HEY! He seriously just abandoned his damn post", said the guard dumbfounded.

"He did the smart thing kid! Now get the hell out of our way", said Leslie, as she and Carrie continued making their way out of the hospital moving past the guard as he stood in the entry confused, pulling out his radio.

"Hey Murphy! Darrell just abandoned his post and two people walked out behind him", said the guard reluctantly.

"What do you mean? What hell is going on over there", a voice yelled from the radio.

Before the guard had a chance to speak a loud crack was heard and the guard collapsed to the ground as Crystal continued to smash in his skull. She then exited the hospital looking around for Carrie and Leslie noticing them making their way to a white vehicle. Crystal started moving quickly trying to catch up to them, but they got into the car pulling out and Leslie quickly sped her way out of the parking lot with Crystal getting close enough to smash in one of the back passenger windows running after them, but she couldn't keep up with the vehicle. They were free of the threat as Leslie and Carrie looked at each other now able to breathe easy making their way to Wayne Manor. Crystal could hear all the sirens surrounding the area as she made her way across the street away from the hospital brushing her hair back as it turned a brunette color with her eyes also changing from blue to green as more features began to change on her face. Batman made his way out of the hospital coming across the dead security

guard and saw dozens of police vehicles surrounding the place. He activated his comm in his mask as Alfred's voice was heard.

"Master Bruce, good news I just heard from Dr. Thompkins. They made it out of the hospital safely and are on their way to the manor thank goodness", said Alfred in a relieved tone of voice.

"Good. Alfred I'll be making my way back shortly", said Batman, knowing he had to inform Gordon of what he saw and what the best course of action will be necessary to face this threat.

It wasn't long before the GCPD investigation of the hospital was in full swing with Batman approaching Gordon to inform him of what they might be up against.

"Batman, I understand multiple officers are dead, one nurse, and five security guards. What the hell happened in there? It's a goddamn massacre! And what is it that we're dealing with? According to eyewitnesses officer's clearly fired on the suspects, but nothing. The remaining security team members, who were watching on the CCTV's, stated that you confronted the perpetrators. I take it clearly they're the ones who did that to you", said Gordon in a frustrated and confused tone noticing the hand print embedded in Batman's armor.

"This wasn't a fight anyone was prepared for. I'm not sure what it is we are fighting, but it's a special case. One that currently doesn't seem to have a weakness to any form of harm", said Batman in a stoic calm tone, as though not to show any signs of frustration or anger for allowing Howard and Crystal escape.

"Well, whatever is going on. And whoever or whatever these people are. We need to find a solution before they decide to attack again. Do what you do and fast", said Gordon, still in his frustrated tone.

Back at the bat-cave Leslie and Alfred were talking. They both paused hearing the roaring engine of the batmobile approaching. Within moments the batmobile made it to its platform parking. Batman exited the batmobile before approaching the pair. He removed his cowl and placed it on the bat-computer, while Alfred noticed the handprint in his armor and spoke.

"Good heavens Master Bruce are you alright", asked Alfred concerned.

"The armor took most of the impact. I'll be fine, just needs replacing is all Alfred", said Batman removing the armor along with his cape.

"Well Master Bruce, you'll be happy to hear Ms. Kelley is safe and resting in her room. Dr. Thompkins made sure she had everything she needed to finish recovering", said Alfred, as Bruce took a seat in front of his bat-computer looking relieved.

"Thank you and my gratitude especially goes to you Leslie. You put yourself at risk protecting her and I couldn't be more appreciative", said Bruce, in a thankful tone but noticed by both Leslie and Alfred he has many thoughts racing through his mind.

"Bruce. I know you have a lot on your mind. But you shouldn't allow this girl to be a part of this. What you are doing here and having her be involved. The poor thing has been traumatized enough. Almost killed twice by the same person who murdered her friends only recently", said Leslie, in a very concerned tone. "Hell they even attacked my hospital killing god knows how many just to get to her. And even you couldn't stop them. You can't make this her war Bruce. It shouldn't even be a fight you bring upon yourself", said Leslie, trying to get through to Bruce, almost in a tone begging him to stop this one time.

"Leslie. You know why I can't stop. But you're right it might be better for Carrie if....", Bruce was suddenly cut off.

"BETTER FOR CARRIE IF WHAT", shouted Carrie angrily, standing over the balcony above the Bat-families costume display cases. "I swear to god Bruce, if you say that I'm being sent away for my own safety...THINK AGAIN", she continued angrily making her way down to where Bruce was sitting.

"Carrie. Please try to understand...", Leslie tried to speak but was cut off.

"Dr. Thompkins, thank you for helping me, but right now please don't. Bruce, I'm supposed to be your partner. I'm supposed to be by your side in the shit. Yes, I'm traumatized by recent events, but never once did you see me head for the door. I've proven no matter how battered and beaten or mentally scarred by the amount of death I've experienced. I'm not going anywhere. I knew what my purpose was the moment I donned my amateur Robin costume and prevented a purse snatcher from robbing a couple. So, if you think you're going to send me off to some safe house in Europe go ahead. I'll find my way back to Gotham to do what I have to do just as I know you would", Carrie said, still in her angered tone.

The whole cave was dead silent for a moment. You could barely hear a breath. Bruce then got to his feet and looked over to Alfred who looked back at Bruce knowing that privacy was going to be needed.

"Dr. Thompkins, I do believe a private discussion is required to be had. Please follow me up to the manor and I'll put on a fresh pot of coffee. We also have a few scones if you'd like", said Alfred, in his proper gentlemanly tone.

"Of course, Alfred. Lead the way", she said in a hesitant tone, not wanting to leave, but knew this was something only Carrie and Bruce should settle.

Once they left the cave Bruce looked over to Carrie and looked her dead in the eye as Carrie who still displayed signs of anger and frustration. Bruce gestured for her to take a seat, which

she obliged as he sat against the computer desk as he pondered for a few minutes with Carrie waiting patiently.

“Carrie. You’re ready”, said Bruce, with absolute certainty.

“Wait what”, said Carrie, completely thrown for a loop with confusion.

“Yes. You’ve been put through more than one event that would make almost anyone else either quit or break. But despite all the horror and abuse you’ve been put through. Like you said you’re still here. And the look you gave me I’ve only ever seen from my other proteges. This will be a difficult case. More likely one of the deadliest considering who we’re fighting are super human and can’t be really harmed nor killed as far as we’re aware. Together we will find a way to beat them. Partner”, said Bruce, with the utmost certainty in his voice knowing the choice he’s making is the right one as he sticks his hand out to shake Carrie’s hand.

Carrie got up moving Bruce’s hand away and going in for a hug instead. Bruce thought to himself if it was the right time to tell Carrie what happened with her parents. There never is a good time with these things.

“Carrie. There’s something you need to know”, Bruce said, pausing while putting his hands on her shoulders and moving her so they were looking eye to eye as he took a knee. “Your parents. I had Gordon send some people over to have them brought to the hospital, but”, he continued but stopped seeing Carrie open her mouth to speak.

“Bruce. Those people might have brought me into this world. But they didn’t raise me to live in it. My family is one that I made. You, Alfred, Michelle, and Lucas. That’s what my family consisted of and half of which is gone. If you’re about to tell me they are dead...it’s not going to impact my life. Losing you and Alfred would. Losing Michelle and Lucas did and I still am working through the fact I’ll never see them again. Probably will for a long time”, said Carrie, as tears rolled down her face.

“I’m sorry Carrie. But know that this is and always will be your home. I’ll be putting in some paperwork that’ll make you”, Bruce was cut off immediately by Carrie hugging him tighter than before. He didn’t have to finish, she already knew and accepted him as her guardian as a small smile of relief came over Bruce’s face.

...Somewhere in the Narrows

Plastique was standing on the rooftop leaning on the building’s edge gazing upon the city of Gotham as though it were worlds apart from the Narrows. She snarls as memories flash through her mind. Images of being covered in blood and grim, while the sounds of explosions and gunfire could be heard around her as she supported her injured brother trudging along. Another image flashed in her mind as she’s surrounded by multiple comrades including her brother with

looks of complete dread on their faces. One by one their heads exploded. Blood and viscera flew through the air, some splattering on her as she couldn't move due to shock as she turned to her brother who gave her a sorrowful, but sweet little smile before a flash of red covered her face. Plastique screamed "NO", as she came out of her memory feeling her hand tremble out of anger, while footsteps could be heard getting closer behind her. Plastique turned to see Netbug walking her way towards Plastique leaning on the edge next to her.

"You okay! Had a feeling you'd be here. Losing yourself in thought like you always do when you're alone. You wanna talk about it", asked Netbug, in a concerned tone.

"Thinking it over as the memories creep in. I realize how lucky we are to still be here", Plastique said, while reaching to the back of her neck feeling a tiny scar. "I can never shake off the memories. The look on Don's face before that bitch flipped the switch. It's why we need to succeed in what we're doing. With you and BK I know we can all get our retributions. BK for what Stagg did to him and Waller for what that monster did to me and forced you to do", said Plastique, in a cold rage filled tone as Netbug reached over and held her hand to help calm her.

"I know Bette. Is it okay to admit I'm scared? I mean sure we've survived this far and caused some damage here and there. But we're ants babe. Ants who could be stomped out by the giants we're at war with. Stagg and Waller have all the power we could never fathom", said Netbug, in a worried tone.

"We may not have their resources or manpower. But we have a weapon that gives us the edge they will never see coming. And this weapon will be the reason we'll win in the end. We might be too obscure, but BK. He is the key to draw Waller out where we couldn't before. She won't be able to resist getting her talons on someone with his abilities to be used for her Task Force or who knows what else", said Plastique, in an enthusiastic smile knowing she has the upper hand despite the odds against her survival.

"You always seem to have it figured out one way or another and I admire that about you. But Bette. Not trying to rain on your parade, but if things do take a turn we'll need to run. You put way too much faith in that murderous psychopath. The things he has made me do for him in the last few weeks. It'll be hard to move past from", said Netbug, in a haunting tone.

"I won't defend everything he's done. But some part of me understands it. A form of morbid practice makes perfect as they say. Nevertheless my faith is well placed. He showed me the full length of his powers. There's no doubt in my mind that by the end of everything we're doing. Whether I die or not. There's going to be a big bright smile on my face with pure satisfaction", said Plastique, smiling at Netbug with pure confidence.

"Your optimism can't be denied babe. I hope you're right. Truly. I hope it all goes down in a way where everything we did wasn't for nothing", Netbug said, leaning her head on Plastiques shoulder.

“Gotham can be beautiful from this view. I wanted to thank you Dani for saving me. And for staying with me every step of the way”, said Plastique, laying her head against Netbug’s.

“Well, I have to redeem myself for being involved in the process for those bombs they put in your neck. Thankfully I was able to get it out of you, but why’d you keep it”, Netbug asked curiously.

“A reminder. And a promise my dear”, said Plastique, as hatred filled her whole body. After a few moments of glaring at the city lights. Plastique pulled a small black remote with two buttons out of her black coat and handed it to Netbug. “Take this”, she continued.

“What’s this detonator for?”, asked Netbug, in a curious tone.

“The top button detonates the incendiaries I hooked up around your hideout. And the bottom button”, smiled Plastique, as she kissed Netbug on the cheek. “Will make your dreams come true”, she continued before walking away.

Netbug watched Plastique leave the roof then turned back to the city before looking down at the remote. It was small and light, but Netbug couldn’t help feeling an impossible weight this remote carried. She turned her back on Gotham to gaze upon the Narrows. For some reason as Netbug looked intently a small smile came over her face. She then immediately shook it off as she caught herself remembering something that no longer mattered. Netbug soon followed Plastique’s example and left the roof.

Chapter 9: Netbug

A few days have gone by since the attack on the hospital. The citizens of Gotham were still talking about the events that transpired over the last week from the massacre in the suburbs to the murder of a woman at the Gotham overlook. It seemed a black cloud was growing around Gotham again. One that hasn’t filled the citizens with fear and dread since the Joker’s war on Gotham two years prior. At Wayne Manor Bruce had Carrie put on her Robin costume practicing to maneuver and fight, while getting accustomed to it and utilizing the tools it came with. Bruce and Alfred set up targets and obstacles for Carrie to practice her aim with the slingshot as well as her throw with the other weapons her utility belt carries. While Bruce was observing her abilities Alfred spoke.

“Ms. Kelley is looking quite up to par as she’s recovered. The real question being is how is she doing mentally? And whether or not you truly think it’s time for her to go out on patrol with you”, Alfred questioned in a curious but also concerned tone.

“She’s ready Alfred. And I’ve scheduled sessions for Carrie to talk with Dr. Leiland in case there is any PTSD from her recent trauma. She’s strong. Stronger than I was at her age”, said

Bruce confidently, as his cell phone rings. He pulls it out of his pocket and speaks. "Lucius, how's it all going", Bruce asked curiously.

"Bruce, it wasn't easy but I got something. I'll be sending you the coordinates shortly. Good luck Bruce and be careful", said Lucius, in a concerned worry tone.

"Thank you Lucius", said Bruce, as he hung up the phone then looked over at Carrie. "Carrie! That's enough practice. Tonight's the real deal. We're going to apprehend someone who's either the killer we've been hunting or an accomplice to them", he continued as Carrie paused looking at Bruce as her smile grew letting him know she's ready to go.

...Later, on the Gotham City Monorail

The Gotham City monorail was riding through the city zipping by the skyscrapers above the evening traffic as people were going home from work. A skinny light skinned man wearing a hoodie with dark curly hair was resting his head back, with his eyes closed and earphones in each ear as he was listening to music. Some songs were rap and others were synthwave as he bobbed his head to the beat. There wasn't a care in the world as he enjoyed his music until sometime went by and the monorail began to slow down. The man's eyes slowly opened as the monorail came to a complete stop to allow more passengers on board and others to exit. People flooded into the monorail car as an elderly dark skinned woman sat next to him. The woman looked like she came from work and was going home as the man looked at her with a sweet smile as she smiled back.

"Karl, nice to meet you", said the hooded man, putting out his hand for the woman to shake it.

"Josephine, nice to meet you Karl", said the woman reciprocating the hand shake.

"What kind of music do you like Josephine", asked Karl, as he hands Josephine a earphone.

"Oh, that's alright I'm fine young man", said Josephine, turning down Karl's offer to listen to music with him.

"Come on Josephine I insist, what music do you like? I promise I keep the earphones clean", joked Karl, still holding out his earphone for Josephine to take.

"Alright, if you insist. I'm not picky, but I will let you know if I don't like it", smiled Josephine, taking the earphone and putting it in her ear.

"Fair enough", smiled Karl, as he laid his head back turning on some music as Josephine did the same.

They enjoyed listening to music together until the monorail came to a stop sometime later as Joesphine took out the earphone and handed it back to Karl.

“This is my stop. I appreciate the tunes, kid. You made my day. Hopefully if the lord favors it we’ll do this again”, said Joesphine smiling, as she gets to her feet to exit.

“Nothing better than sharing some music with a stranger. I hope we’ll get the chance again ma’am. Take care of yourself, it’s been scary out there lately”, said Karl, waving goodbye to Josephine smiling.

When Josephine exited the car Karl paid attention to the time and specifically the stop. Making a mental note of it all as a bunch of passengers exited out of the car. A thought came to his mind as though remembering something important. He reached into his hoodie pocket and pulled out a photo. It was of him smiling happily as a beautiful brunette haired woman was kissing him on the cheek. He felt something warm in his chest followed by despair and sadness. He looked around the monorail car before looking back down at the photo with a look of contemplation on his face. He took a deep breath and put the photo back in his pocket. He then laid back his head returning to listening to his tunes again without a care in the world. When he reached his stop he got off the monorail headed down from the station steps. He made his way to a nearby parking lot getting into a vehicle. He started the car engine then drove away.

Night fell upon Gotham as Batman and Robin made their way to the bat-mobile. Batman turned on the engine making it roar loudly before taking off towards The Narrows. After some time went by they drove over the Narrows drawbridge. Batman hit a button and spoke the word “Camouflage”. This made the bat-mobile become practically invisible as he pulled into a nearby alleyway, then looked over to Robin.

“Prepare to utilize your grappling hook in 3...2...1”, said Batman, before hitting another button ejecting both himself and Robin as they flew high in between the building as they fired their grappling hooks carrying them the rest of the way to the roof.

After they reached the roof Batman took off running as Robin followed behind him doing her best to keep up as they headed for the coordinates provided by Lucius. They leaped onto several rooftops until Batman finally came to a stop. They reached the coordinates Batman was checking on the microcomputer in his gauntlet. He then hit a button on his gauntlet activating the comms in his mask to contact Gordon.

“Gordon, I’m going to send you coordinates. Have a cruiser ready to pick up the suspect”, said Batman in his augmented voice.

“Roger that Batman”, said Gordon, hanging up the phone as Batman sent him the coordinates.

Batman and Robin proceeded to enter the building quietly, beginning their investigation searching for any possible sign of a threat. The building used to be a large apartment complex. The vigilante's went room to room checking for their perpetrator making their way down the floors keeping silent, while doing so to not cause an alert. Batman started to notice that certain apartment floors were rigged with incendiary explosives. He knew they were getting closer to who they were looking for. They entered the next floor and noticed a camera as they quickly ducked out of sight. Batman looked at Robin and spoke.

"Robin, when I give the order, use your slingshot and fire a smoke shot into the hallway. More likely it's rigged to alert who were looking for and can't have them making a run for it", instructed Batman.

"Roger, that boss. What are you gonna do?", Robin asked, in a curious tone.

Batman didn't respond as he moved to look down the hallway and opened up his gauntlet, switching the vision in his mask to thermal. He was able to glimpse heat being generated a few doors down before the camera noticed him. He then turned back to Robin.

"Okay I want you to fire three shots from your sling. Use the length between the doors. One shot close, another towards the middle of the hallway, and one at the far side. You'll only have a half a second per each shot. On my go", said Batman pulling out a special batarang used to create a small emp wave in case the hallway was rigged with traps, while Robin pulled out three smoke pellets from her utility belt and prepared the first shot. "GO", he continued, tossing the batarang simultaneously as Robin fired each shot creating smoke all along the hallway as the batarang detonated.

Batman moved fast as lightning with Robin right behind him as they swiftly moved down the hallway to the door generating the heat. Batman immediately switched lenses bursting through the door finding Netbug pulling out her phone quickly hitting a few buttons causing the phone to combust into flames sparks as it fried. Before she could do the same to her laptop, Batman pulled out a bola quickly throwing it at her as it wrapped around her upper body, entrapping her as Robin ran into the room kicking the entangled Netbug in the chest knocking her to the ground. Batman entered the room like a beast about to tear through his prey as Netbug looked upon him in horror. Batman grabbed Netbug lifting her up before setting her down in a nearby chair as Robin cuffed her wrists and then removed the bola.

"Robin grab the laptop", said Batman, in a cold dark tone staring directly into Netbug's eyes as she looks upon him in terror knowing she's finished. "I have some questions for you. And you will answer honestly. Otherwise I won't be responsible for my actions. I promise you the pain I'll inflict will always be in the back of your mind making you tremble every time you even consider causing harm to others. You understand", asked Batman, in a dark vengeful tone as Netbug nodded in agreement. "Are you the one who planned the murders around Gotham? The overlook. The suburb massacre. The deaths of Penguins thugs", he continued.

“NO! I didn’t kill anyone. I swear it wasn’t me”, said Netbug, as though in a panic knowing she has failed Plastique and her crew.

“Drop the innocent act. You’re done. We know you run the app the killers used to find their victims and we know you were involved in the Stagg building explosion in Bludhaven”, Batman said in an accusing tone.

“How did you find out?....Wait...Nightwing. He survived didn’t he?”, Netbug asked, panicking and breathing heavily.

“He did and I have eyes and ears everywhere. You came to my city. That was the biggest mistake you and your group could have ever made”, said Batman, coldly as Robin was almost studying the way Batman interrogated Netbug. “Now, tell me who the killers are, where they are, and what they are”, said Batman, in a threatening tone.

“Look if I talk I’m dead I can’t”, Netbug said as she was cut off.

Batman walked behind her grabbing the back of the chair dragging her across the room as he pulled out a small explosive batarang throwing it at the room's windows. The window exploded as Batman lifted Netbug and hung her out on the edge outside the window as she screamed in terror.

“OK! OK! I’LL TALK! JUST PULL ME IN”!

Batman pulled her back into the room and slammed her chair back to the floor as she took a minute to calm down enough to speak. Once she stopped breathing heavily she was able to start talking.

“Okay! Ok. Look, I’m sure by now you’ve heard this time and again in your experience, but this time seriously, even you Batman. You’re way out of your league. Neither you or Robin or even if you had Nightwing together, don’t stand a chance. You’re getting in the middle of a war and there are people way more menacing and bigger than you are involved. Stagg you already know about. But Amanda Waller also has a hand in it”, said Netbug, in a shameful tone.

Robin looked at Batman confused, wanting to ask a question, but knew it wasn’t the time as Batman needed to get as much information as possible and maybe she’ll learn why her family was targeted.

“Give me a full picture of what is going on and why”, demanded Batman.

“Look, I worked for Amanada Waller at one point and helped her and Stagg in the development of a system to trigger micro-bombs used to be injected into people who have a criminal record, to force them into doing missions for the government. Usually unique baddies or super villains. I decided that what they were doing was wrong and god forbid they ever decided

to go further with the technology so I sided with some people whose lives were ruined by these two giants as a way to redeem myself. Only the people I sided with were broken. They only want revenge. And the one you're hunting used my cyber skills to build an online hunting ground. What you are hunting isn't exactly easy to explain. It's like something out of your nightmares, but it's real. The murders that happened around Gotham. It's a little bit more complicated, but also isn't. All the victims were random. The dating app was real. It was the unlucky ones matched with it. What you're seeking, was simply put, playing the role of an untraceable killer. Practicing with its victims for when the day comes it kills Stagg. The messed up thing is it isn't insane. The thinking and rationale behind its process is to us insane, but to this thing it makes perfect sense. Humanity is all, but gone from the mentality of this monster. There's a complete disconnect and disregard for human life. I guess it played its role well since they have been on the loose for a year and a half", explained Netbug.

Robin heard the words, but couldn't believe them. Random. They were all just random. Her family died by chance and for no other reason. How can anyone accept that? She thought to herself. Batman noticed Robin's body language and put a hand on her shoulder understanding her pain and anger.

"Give us a name to this untraceable killer", demanded Batman, in an angered tone.

"I don't know its name. Hell, I don't think I've ever seen their real face. I'm sure in your confrontations you've noticed that who you were seeing isn't who they are", explained Netbug, as Batman reflected on when he noticed Howard's features change during their fight when he zapped him with his gloves. "Is it clicking yet? You're both completely out of your depth in understanding how dangerous the thing you're fighting is. We're talking about a being who can be anywhere and be anyone, which is only a tiny fraction of what they can do. You have noticed there are two of them", asked Netbug, in a haunting almost frightened tone.

"Yes, a male and a female", answered Batman.

"Are you sure? Or is that just another role they are playing", said Netbug, trying to keep composure but even though what Netbug was saying confused him he couldn't deny the terror in her eyes.

"I understand. All the killers that we've caught on CCTV were similar to the way another killer Jane Doe goes about attacking their victims. This thing wears a disguise hiding its true identity", Batman said, rationalizing what they are up against. Robin was trying to understand and couldn't help but speak.

"I'm sorry, but how is any of this possible? Are you saying we're fighting an alien? Some kind shapeshifting monster! Are you serious?", she exclaimed, in a frustrated tone.

"It's not an alien! I told you it's complicated. I don't fully understand any of it myself and I work with them. There's only one person who has ever seen the full extent of this thing's abilities",

Netbug said, but realizing she pretty much gave away that there are more involved in her operation.

"Let me guess. Plastique is that one person isn't she?", asked Batman, knowing his assumption is correct, but wanted to see how Netbug would react.

"I won't talk anymore on the subject. You can do whatever you want to me. Go ahead and throw me out the window. I still won't say another thing on the subject", said Netbug, as sweat dripped down her head.

"I already got what I needed. We'll bring her into custody in time, but what I want to know now is how did your associate know Penguin was transferring money out of the city", asked Batman, in a dark curious tone.

"When you have the skills I have, all we had to do was get Penguin's location and my associate infiltrated his ranks getting information on when the transfer would occur. With his abilities, getting information like that was child's play", said Netbug, in a fearful tone.

Robin heard a car pull up in front of the building through the shattered window. She made her way over and looked down to see a police cruiser park along the sidewalk.

"Batman cops arrived", she said, as Batman moved behind Netbug.

"You move or try to run and you won't have a moment to regret your decision, because you'll be too busy thinking about the pain from your legs being broken. Keep trying to get away after that and I'll make you crawl to the bottom floor. Understand", said Batman, coldly and quietly giving Netbug goosebumps in fear as he uncuffed her from the chair and re-cuffing her wrists together getting her to her feet. "Robin, grab her laptop. And you Netbug will lead us to your server room", he continued, pushing Netbug out of the apartment's front door, while Robin snatched Netbug's laptop.

Batman, Robin, and Netbug started making their way down to the server room. Simultaneously as this was all happening below outside the building two officers a male and female exit out of their cruiser and just before they begin approaching the building a voice is heard.

"Hello there officers! Don't usually see badges in the Narrows", said the man in an excitable tone.

The man was average height and average build wearing a gray hoodie. Due to it being dark the cops had difficulty making out his face as he approached them. The female officer spoke.

“Sir, we need you to take a step back, we are in the middle of an investigation”, said the cop, being as cordial as she can be. Trying not to antagonize the hooded man, so they could get back to their jobs.

“Forgive me. I just wanted to shake your hands for taking the time to be brave enough to come here”, said the hooded man, in a friendly tone reaching out his hand for a hand shake.

The male cop intervened and approached the hooded man not interested in whatever game this guy is trying to pull to disrupt their job.

“Hey buddy, we’re not playing around ok. Time to get lost”, said the male cop approaching the man.

Before the cop even had a chance to react the hooded man grabbed him by the face as his fingers elongated around the cops entire head and began to tighten. The cop was screaming in agony as the female officer panicked trying to pull out her weapon, but before she could the hooded man crushed the male cop's skull making blood flow from his eyes, ears, and nose. The officer was dead before the hooded man lifted his body, tossing it full force hitting the female officer knocking her to the ground. The hooded man pounced on top of her, rubbing his hands along her face and her lips. She started trying to fight back and managed to get ahold of his hoodie and pulled it off as the hooded man put his hands around her neck strangling her. The last thing she ever saw, unable to scream in terror, was a round hairless, faceless, fleshy head with a slit beginning to form a mouth smiling.

Back in the building Batman and Robin were still making their way down the apartment building escorting Netbug who sneakily moved her fingers up her sleeve getting ahold of the remote Plastique gave her. Once getting the remote in the right position in her hand they made it outside the server room. She pressed the top button right as they were about to enter the server room. The incendiaries all around the building started going off as the server room erupted in flames destroying the server as Batman grabbed Netbug in anger.

“WHAT DID YOU DO”, he shouted.

Netbug simply smiled, satisfied knowing the information on the servers will never leak, giving away Plastiques information despite losing countless valuable files on the micro-bombs. The fire started to rage through several parts of the building as Robin grabbed Batman’s arm.

“Batman we need to go now”, she shouted as they started making their way to the stairway to get out of the apartment building.

Batman, Robin, and Netbug hurried down the flight of stairs to the next floor. They were making their way through the hallway to the next set of stairs when they heard footsteps of multiple people making their way up the stairs. The trio paused when two officers, walking side by side a male and a female, entered the hallway and started walking towards them. The male

was big, bigger than Batman in size and musculature, while the female was smaller but had a strong athletic build. Both had their weapons drawn. Netbug noticed they were both looking directly at her. The look was familiar to her as her skin became pale with sweat dripping down in absolute fear. She was only able to utter a single word.

“WAIT”, she screamed.

There was a flash and a bullet went through Netbug’s skull. She fell to the ground dead dropping the remote out of her hand never getting the chance to press the second button. No one had time to think about Netbug’s death as Batman was hit twice in his chest armor with both him and Robin ducking for cover inside the open apartment doors opposite of each other. Robin kept the laptop close, while Batman threw a concussion bomb at the cops which only distracted them for a moment as smoke from the fire began to build. The cops regained their focus from the concussion blast then continued to open fire on the vigilantes with perfect coordination. After one officer empties a magazine in their pistol the other open fires, while they reload repeating the cycle as bullets hit the walls and ricocheting. Batman pulled out a couple small batarangs and charged into the smoke throwing the projectiles with pinpoint precision hitting the pistols locking the trigger mechanism. Batman battled the officers, while Robin knew she had to get the laptop to a safe place, so she ran to a nearby window throwing an explosive batarang shattering it. She pulled out her grappling hook and looked for a vintage point. She heard a crash by the apartment door seeing the female officer hit the ground. The officer noticed Robin and with impressive flexibility used her arms and legs to lift up her body in a perfect arch as her neck twisted her head a complete 360 then lifted it up as though becoming a bizarre creature wearing the skin of a human as she looked close at Robin as though she noticed something she recognized and a cruel smile came over the twisted officers face. She started to crawl quickly towards Robin with Robin immediately jumping out the window firing her grappling hook which attached to a nearby building zipping away from the horror that came at her. The officer reshaped herself to her regular human form as she looked out the window in disgust before turning around to reenter the fight with Batman who was currently in a hand to hand fight with the male officer. The fires in the building were raging and the smoke was getting thicker. Batman used his expertise in martial arts to counter and beat on the male officer. Even when the female officer stepped in Batman was still holding his own against both of them even with their near perfect coordination. It was like fighting one mind with two unbreakable bodies and Batman knew even though he’s maintaining the fight eventually this confrontation will not end in his favor, but he always had an exit strategy and knew this situation was a good way to test if these enemies or enemy could be harmed by fire. He continued taking in his surroundings while he continued to dodge and counter incoming attacks from the officers who were throwing punches and kicks so powerful their fists would tear through the building walls as he noticed the ceiling above was showing signs of being burnt through. He used his agility to move completely out of reach of the officers as he reached down to his utility belt pulling out a special piece of equipment called the batclaw. Batman attached the batclaw to his grapnel gun and aimed it at the ceiling firing unleashing three hooks attaching to three points of the ceiling as the officers charged him, while he pulled as hard as he could on the cable pulling down a large abundance of cindered debris and smoke collapsing on top of the officers. Batman stood paused for a

moment when he could hear footsteps as the male officer covered in black smoke and rubble made his way towards Batman. A crash was heard behind Batman as he noticed Robin appear out of the shattered window using her slingshot firing explosive shots at the officer blasting off pieces of his tactical gear knocking him back as Batman noticed the structure of the apartment was starting to collapse as it rumbled with sounds of wood snapping and glass shattering. He ran towards Robin as they both leaped from the window outside the building firing their grapnel guns, while the building was heard collapsing behind them. They retrieved the laptop at a nearby rooftop as Batman observed the building completely crashing down with fire erupting from the debris. He started looking for any sign of movement from the two officers, but there was none. Not a sliver of life could be seen. Robin stood next to Batman looking up to him not sure whether to be relieved or worried and spoke.

"Batman. Did we get them? Do you think that was enough to end this nightmare? I mean. A building dropped on top of them", said Robin, in a hopeful tone as though almost praying that whatever those monsters were, they were dead. Whether they were the same ones who killed Michelle or not, please let them be dead.

"I don't think so Robin. More than likely, I get the feeling this won't be the last time we face whatever these things are. Let's head back to the cave and download whatever's on that laptop onto the bat computer", said Batman, looking over the fiery rubble and debris when almost immediately he could hear sirens in the distance. The two vigilantes left the rooftop and headed back to the batmobile.

"Roger that boss", said Robin, still retaining her look of concern as she followed Batman after getting one last look at the apartment's destruction.

A few blocks away from the collapsed building the hooded man is walking away from the fiery destruction, padding off the ashes and soot from his hoodie, while making his way to a vehicle. He got into his vehicle and drove away from the Narrows right as emergency responders were driving over the bridge. He made his way to the outskirts of the city miles away from Gotham. The man came upon an abandoned hotel and drove into the parking lot where several black vans were also parked. He got out of the vehicle and started approaching the hotel when Plastique walked out of the building making her way towards the hooded man.

"BK, everything alright", Plastique asked, in a confused tone.

"No. You and the boys stay where you are for now. Our little HQ in the Narrows has burnt to the ground", said BK, as he noticed Plastique had a look of dread come over her face.

"BK. Dani's alive right? You got her out. That'd been an easy task for you right? She's gotta be not far behind you", asked Plastique, in complete denial of what she already knew.

"Bette, I'm sorry. Dani isn't coming. Her part in our crusade is over", said BK, in a cold tone.

There was a long pause as Plastique stood motionless due to the shock of the words she just heard. "Bette? You need a moment", asked BK, looking over Plastique confused.

"What happened? Who killed her", Plastique asked, finally speaking, still in a state of shock as tears started to form, but she was doing her damndest to hold back the pain, but she was failing.

"Batman got to her. The moment I saw them I knew he made her talk. I made it quick", BK said, while still retaining his cold tone.

"You killed her? Why didn't you do something? You could've saved her", asked Plastique, as her voice started to raise in anger.

"Bette. I understand your upset about your girlfriend. But she was compromised. Who knows what she told them and I kept her from saying anymore. In our line of work she became a liability. If Batman was able to get to her, who's to say Waller wasn't close on the trail", explained BK, not showing a sign of emotion in his voice.

"We needed her BK. I needed her", Plastique said, starting to break as tears rolled down her face as she collapsed to her knees.

"I know. I'm sorry. Take some time to grieve and mourn her. When you're done we'll get back to work. If you're still willing to fight", said BK, attempting to show empathy for Plastique's loss.

"I'll be ready. But for now it's best you stay away from here. I may not know how to kill you. But with how I'm feeling right now", said Plastique, as rage came upon her face as tears still rolled down her cheek.

"I understand. Do what you need to do. And when you're done we will continue. I'm going to send Gotham a message in the meantime", said BK, back to his cold empty tone displaying little to no emotion on his face as he turned back towards the car and began walking towards it.

After BK walked a few steps away from Plastique she started to cry. Flashes appeared in her mind of her brother smiling at her before his death. The last image of Netbug that appeared in her mind was her smile. The rage consumed her over her grief as she pulled out a pistol from her jacket and opened fire on BK hitting him multiple times as they punctured his back through his chest but it was nothing to him. The wounds closed as quick as they were opened as not a hint of blood appeared. He didn't even acknowledge it ever happened. He made it to his car, opened the door and got in before turning on the ignition. He simply backed up the car and drove off leaving Plastique to her anger and grief for her dead lover.

Meanwhile, back at the batcave Batman hooked up Netbug's laptop to the bat-computer and began starting the encryption process to gain access to the files on it. Robin came over and removed her mask with the black eye make up smeared a little, while she also removed her

hood watching the percentage of the encryption begin to slowly go up. Batman removed his cowl looking over to her.

“How’d it feel tonight, being out in the field”, he asked, in a curious tone as he noticed Robin look up at him as a look of uncertainty came over her face.

“It was terrifying, but also the most exciting thing I’ve ever done. But that girl Netbug. What happened to her was so quick. I felt helpless. One moment we’re escorting her and then a flash and then she dropped”, Carrie said, in a somber sad tone.

“We do our best to react quickly enough to save lives. But sometimes you can’t. Best thing we can do is find out what’s going on and end it all”, said Bruce, looking at Carrie before gazing back up to the bat-computer monitor.

“I just hope we’ve seen the last of that shapeshifter thing. Bruce it feels like we’re just skimming the bare bones of this case”, said Carrie, in a worried frightened tone recollecting on the female officer crawling at her.

“That’s because this is far bigger than a simple serial killer case now. Between the involvement of Stagg, Amanda Waller, Plastique and her crew along with the untraceable killer. This is going to get a lot of people killed unless we’re able to get to the bottom of it. I think it’s time I planned to pay Simon Stagg a visit”, said Bruce, pondering over the best approach to everything they learned at the apartment in the Narrows.

“Can I ask who Amanda Waller is”, asked Carrie curiously.

“Complicated”, responded Bruce. “And trouble for us and the rest of the city”, he continued, as though knowing the confrontations ahead are going to be extremely dangerous not just for Robin but for himself as well.

Chapter 10: Funeral

Carrie tossed and turned dripping in sweat as she slept with flashes of blood, a hammer, a cop crawling at her, screams of her friends blaring in her ears, before gazing in Crystal’s face as she smiles sinisterly before her face melts away. Carrie woke up screaming then took a moment to realize where she was. She was safe in Wayne Manor. In her room. In her bed. She wiped the sweat off her brow and took a moment to breathe, coming to terms what she experienced was a nightmare. Due to what today was, it made sense why she would dream what she did. Carrie got out of bed, showered, put on a little makeup, and made up her short red hair nicely before getting on a black dress for the funeral of her dear friends. She exited her room ready to go as she noticed Alfred and Bruce Wayne in their black suits, with black buttoned shirts, and black ties. Carrie made it down the steps before Bruce spoke.

“Good morning Carrie, you ready to go”, asked Bruce, in a warm tone with a sad look in his eyes.

“Yes, I’m ready to pay my respects. Thank you for getting everything setup for this”, said Carrie in a sad but appreciated tone giving Bruce a small smile.

“It’s my pleasure Carrie. Alfred let’s get going”, said Bruce, still in a warm tone.

“Right away sir”, said Alfred, as he opened the front door as the trio exited the manor getting into a Black Santorini Jaguar and leaving the manor grounds.

They later arrived at the Gotham Cathedral, a massive stone church with gothic architecture and statues of saints carved along the top of the entry as stone gargoyles lurk around the roof of the cathedral looking down upon the streets of Gotham. The ceremony took place as a fair number of family members and friends filled half the rows of both sides of the seats in the Cathedral. Two light brown coffins with white roses and orchids were placed on top of closed caskets. The cathedral reverend spoke his sermon until it was time for family and friends to come up and speak fondly of Lucas and Michelle. One person after another spoke their peace as Carrie thought on what she was going to say. Before she realized it Carrie’s turn arrived as she stood up to speak as internally she was nervous, nearly shaking before standing at the podium to speak to everyone about her loved ones.

“Who knows where to begin when something like this occurs. Well, I can say I loved them both. I grew up in a home with two people who as far as I can remember never acknowledged me the way a true parent or guardian should. In fact they didn’t acknowledge me at all. They didn’t want kids. All I was to them was a monthly check. They gave me just enough to live and be healthy so they wouldn’t lose the extra cash they used for something that eventually killed them in the end. I didn’t shed a tear for them. But Lucas and Michelle. There aren’t enough tears to shed. They were the best family I could’ve hoped for. Lucas was the older brother I drove crazy and I know I did because before me he didn’t have gray hair appearing. He and I could fight and argue to the point where outsiders who didn’t know us would show looks of concern. That was our relationship and at the end of the day we’d be sitting on the couch chilling passing the popcorn. I’m going to miss driving that jerk crazy. Michelle.....”, Carrie needed to pause as the tears finally started rolling down her cheeks and the reality of the funeral finally struck. “I’m sorry.....I don’t know if I can even get the words out”, she continued, apologetically nearly breaking down, but gathered enough composure to finish. “Michelle, I love you and there will never be enough words to explain what you and your friendship meant to me. Just know I tried to save you and I’m sorry I didn’t”, Carrie finished speaking and stepped down from the podium making her way back to Bruce crying as he put his arm around her comforting her.

After the funeral Carrie and Bruce with the rest of the guests drove to Gotham Cemetery. Michelle and Lucas were buried next to each other as Carrie placed a rose on top of Lucas and Michelle’s casket along with other members of the family. Carrie watched her dear friend be

lowered into the ground. She turned her head to look upon the rest of the cemetery. Seeing all the different headstones of many shapes and sizes, but something caught her eye. There was a figure in black in the distance standing in the distance with their back turned to her but she could tell they're in front of a headstone themselves mourning just like her. She returned to watching Michelle be lowered into the ground reflecting on everything she's experienced in the past few weeks. The detaining of Raymon after murdering Marco, the massacre at her friends house, the death of her parents, and seeing Netbug get shot all flashing through her mind. So much death in such a short amount of time. A question popped through all the inner turmoil. Would she have experienced all this if she wouldn't have taken on the life as Robin, or maybe would she even still be alive. Her training was the reason she survived against Crystal, it's the reason she detained Raymon, and it'll be the reason she'll save lives now. She may have failed to save Michelle, but she won't falter in her journey to be a partner Batman can be proud of and someone she herself can be proud of.

Back at the Narrows the sky was filled with orange, yellow and reddish tinted clouds from the sun setting. Plastique glared from a rooftop close to where Netbug died and body burned to ash in the collapsed charred rubble.

"You were supposed to be there. You were supposed to be right there next to me when we got our retribution. I know that's not possible not and I'm sorry Dani. You warned me what he was and I was too blind with revenge to care. I'm no longer blind to the monster, but also know I can't win without him. I hope in the afterlife you'll eventually forgive my choices", said Plastique as tears rolled down her face.

Plastique held a bundle of purple orchids, lifted them up and pulled out a lighter. She lit the lighter and set the orchids on fire. As the flowers burned Plastique looked coldly at the burnt ruins and spoke.

"Hope these find you in the afterlife my dear", she said, as Plastique dropped the flowers as they burnt away and ashes were carried away in the gentle breeze.

Chapter 11: Reveal

A day after the funeral Bruce was going through all the encrypted files stored on Netbugs laptop. Many of which had to do with Project: Insertion. He read through every file learning more

and more about the micro-bombs, Waller's involvement in investing in the project for the U.S. government, Task Force X, and Stagg's involvement. Even though Netbug destroyed the servers Bruce was able to get enough information to create a much wider picture of what he's looking for and who he's tracking. The biggest questions still lie on the table. Who is it he and Robin are hunting? What is their name? What is their end goal? How were they created? Are they even human or something else? Bruce kept reading trying to get answers, but knew he needed to go to the source. Waller would be tricky to get his hands on, right now those risks are too high for that kind of confrontation. Getting to Stagg would be the simpler task and could get answers he's been seeking. Once he has finished collecting the data from Netbug's laptop it'll be time to pay Stagg a visit. He heard footsteps approaching him.

"Bruce, is that all the data from the laptop", asked Carrie, curiously.

"Yes it is. There's a lot here. Enough that could potentially throw a wrench into our constitutional system if it were to ever be released to the public", said Bruce, concerned.

"That bad, huh? So I take it that both Waller and Stagg are bad news considering how afraid Netbug was of them. Waller especially", stated Carrie, looking worried thinking of how dangerous these people are compared to the ones they're actually hunting.

"Simon Stagg is just a corrupt entrepreneur with ties to government contracts around the world. Just a man in a suit. Easy. But Amanda Waller. She is trouble. Practically the government's guard dog. We make any moves against her and it'll be a real war. We're going to question Simon first and go from there. I had my stealth drones conduct a scan of the building where he has his office and discovered he has a hidden private server room", explained Bruce, as he reached for something from the computer and handed it to Carrie. "This USB will be used to access his files and download them. That'll be your job. Get into this server room and download everything", he continued in a serious tone.

"Roger, that boss. What are you going to do", she asked, curiously

"I'll be interrogating Simon and keeping him busy. Look over the schematics and memorize where and how to get to the server room. Make sure you have multiple access points and exit strategies. This is purely a stealth mission for you", said Bruce, sternly.

"Yes sir", said Carrie nervously, showing signs of concern.

"You nervous", Bruce asked, knowing all too well reading her body language.

"Yes, but I'm excited too", said Carrie as a determined smile came over her face.

"Good soldier", said Bruce.

The sun set and the Gotham lights started to shine before the blinding glow of the city at night as though a facade of a flourishing city could hide the fear and dread of its citizens. Fear of the next attack knowing it's not an if but when it happens praying it isn't them at the wrong place at the wrong time. A fear felt even on the edge of the outskirts of the city at a massive facility with Stagg across the top front of the grand building. Inside a grand office covered in darkness was made with white marble tiling and pillars with awards and certificates on the wall behind his large black marble desk. A fear felt by Simon Stagg himself looking out a huge window in his office allows him to take in Gotham whether at its most glistening or most frightening. An older man who was in his late fifties, with his five o' clock shadow becoming more prominent, with thinning gray hair, and wearing a black suit very few could afford that wasn't well kept. A man who considered himself a pinnacle of prestige and power couldn't shake the feeling of helplessness in the back of his mind. Simon was so focused on the site of Gotham he didn't notice his own hand quivering. In an instant every thought in his mind and every movement in his body down to the smallest blood cell felt frozen when a voice came from behind him.

"Simon Stagg", said a cold dark voice.

Simon gained enough composure after moments of absolute spine chilling fear went up his back. He was able to pull out the pistol he carried in his suit jacket and aimed it into the darkness of his massive office as the sound of heavy boots taking steps toward him echoed. A batarang flew out from the darkness, knocking the pistol from Simon's hand. Simon then grabbed a remote from his pocket, pressing on the bright white lights reflecting off the white marble, making the room almost blinding. Simon's adrenaline rushed through his body with the taste of metal on his tongue at the sight of Batman now standing in the middle of Simon's office in a pitch black armored suit.

"Good evening, Batman. Apologies for pulling the gun but these days a man in my position can't be too careful. In truth, I'm relieved, but also terrified. I know it's you, if it wasn't I most likely would already be on the floor dead. Or begging to be. I know you figured something out hence you being here clearly. So let's see if we can put some pieces of this nightmare together", said Simon, as he walked over to his desk to take a seat with pure despair in his voice as a man who knows his time will soon run out and has given up.

While Batman confronted Stagg, Robin had already infiltrated the facility using the vent system as she made her way to the floor with the hidden server room in a hidden room next to Stagg's office. Robin exited the vents and was able to monitor for cameras. Any that were seen she either neutralized them with her sling shot or maneuvered out of their line of sight. She found the designated wall according to the schematics. She opened a computer compartment in her gauntlets to download a digitized version of Simon's fingerprints to her gloves that lit up a red color to the lining of her palm to her fingers that could fool the fingerprint scan to enter the room. The scan worked and a hidden door opened for Robin as she entered with little to no effort a room lit up in several colors as she searched for the proper port to stick the usb. Robin made short work of finding the mainframe and inserting the usb, breathing a sigh of relief knowing her part is done and hoping everything with Batman was going smoothly. Back at

Stagg's office Batman and Simon continued to have their discussion as Batman slowly approached Simon's desk.

"I'm sure you're wondering why I'm speaking as if I know who is doing all these awful killings in Gotham? There are always perks when you have what I have and obtaining some CCTV footage of the incident at the hospital as well as footage from my own building that was destroyed in Bludhaven are as simple as making a phone call. Somehow, I always knew that one blunder could be the death of me. It's why even despite having the amount of employees I do, I always kept a close eye on the projects that posed to be potentially dangerous. Could never fully trust my people and now I'm paying for that lack of trust", Simon continued, as frustration quietly raged through his voice.

"What did you do, Stagg", asked Batman coldly, as he stood in front of Simon's desk.

"Batman, accidents happen in this line of work of mine. When you experiment there's always the possibility of creating something unintentionally that can't be replicated. And now that accident is the greatest threat this city has ever seen. And it's a shame I won't be around long enough to see the full potential of what this thing will be capable of. As much as I'm relieved you are here, my death is already sealed and so is yours if you continue to pursue this threat. I watched the footage and what I can promise you is that thing wasn't even trying to hurt you", explained Simon, as a thought appeared in Batman's mind remembering every detail of his fight with Howard in the hallway hospital and what he said.

"You're pushing your luck Batman. You're almost forcing me to go all out and kill every single person in this hospital. I don't want to do that. This isn't the stage for it. Soon I'll bring a terror, this world has never seen. And I will make history. I'll finally be more than just a man made of nothing. So, give it your best shot to stop me".

"You know I'm telling the truth. You know there is nothing in your arsenal that can hurt it nor kill it. And if you're here for answers. I don't have any. I don't know its weaknesses. I don't even know the exact chemical process that morphed its DNA. It's simply an unknown anomaly we can only pray can learn mercy", continued Simon, as pure terror came from his voice.

"There is one thing you can answer. What is it's name", asked Batman, in a cold quiet angry tone.

Simon just sat there quiet and still not moving an inch. Batman couldn't even see Simon's chest breath. It's as if he completely froze for a moment. Simon finally closed his eyes, took a deep breath and quietly uttered a name.

"Basil Karlo", he said, so low it was almost a whisper.

Batman suddenly heard Robin over the comms in his mask. "Batman the download is complete on the USB I'll meet you back at the batmobile", said Robin in an excited confident tone.

Batman didn't reply as he turned his back on Simon Stagg after noticing the bat signal in the distance opening the wrist compartment on his gauntlet hitting a button unleashing a small EMP blast in the office taking out all the lights as Batman practically vanished in front of Stagg's very eyes. Simon turned back to the city to see the bat signal as he pulled out his phone and dials a number and he spoke when someone answered.

"It's time Amanda I hope for both our sakes you're planning on making your move soon", said Simon speaking nervously into his phone. "Just keep me in the loop in case things go sideways. I know you told me to stay put, but if there's any doubt he survives what you're planning. I'm out of here I should've been out of this country already", he continued as fear began to rise heavily in his voice. "Yes, I understand. I understand", Simon said before hanging up the phone as sweat started to drip from his forehead down his cheek as he stared at the city with his hand trembling.

Simultaneously before Batman had his confrontation with Stagg...

Back in Gotham right as Batman was about to confront Simon Stagg in his office, Karl was riding on the Gotham City monorail sitting back on his seat with his gray hoodie up listening to music. He absorbed the beat and the rhythm as he bobbed his head up and down to the melodies. The monorail came to a stop as passengers exited and entered the transport vehicle. Karl noticed a familiar face. It was Josephine who recognized him and smiled as he returned a smile in kind, while he made sure to save a seat for her next to him. She was wearing her work attire like before as she took her seat.

"Well, now ain't this a surprise! How've you been Karl? You got some fine tunes for me today", Josephine said excitedly.

"Josephine, you're always a sight behold! I may have some new stuff for you to enjoy", said Karl happily getting ready to pull out an earphone.

"Start those tunes sucka! It's been a day for me", she said in a playful manner as Karl handed her the earphone and started listening to music.

As some time passed the two enjoyed the music together. Half way through the ride to Josephine's stop and Karl looked at Josephine and turned down the music he opened his mouth to speak.

"Hey Josephine, how old are you?", he asked curiously.

"I'm old enough", she said giggling.

“Fair enough, I wanted to ask you a couple things”, said Karl, smiling pleasantly.

“Sure child what you wanna know”, asked Josephine, curiously.

“What did you always wanna do with your life?”, Karl asked.

“Well, I haven't honestly thought about it for a while. But I did always wanted to be a singer and move people with my voice. Wearing the shiny outfits and flaunting around the stage like the whole world has all eyes on me. But in truth, when I realized reality is reality is when I found myself as a mother. I was very young and raised my boy Kenan to be a good man. I felt that was more important than being a singer. Your children should always be your priority first. Any decent parent knows that or shit at least I hope they would”, said Josephine as though getting lost in thought.

“Where is your son now?”, Karl asked, curiously.

“Well, I raised him to adulthood and he became a cop. To my dismay he became a cop. He got a call in and a...”, Josephine took a pause as a wave of emotions hit her. “He got unlucky. Wrong place at the wrong time when that Freeze villain was on the warpath creating a frozen catastrophe. My son got caught up in the fight. But it was quick so I was told. I never understood why. Why doesn't someone kill that bastard for my son and for every person he has killed. Here I am though still kicking and living my life for him. Praying that one day we'll see each other once more” she said, wiping away her tears as Josephine gathered a smile.

“I'm sorry for your loss. Nothing is worse than losing the one who brings meaning to your life. I had someone in my life who was my everything. The best partner a guy like me could ever hope to ask for. And in a blink she was gone. No rhyme no reason just taken. It broke me. Maybe a good part of me will always be broken”, said Karl, knowing all too well what it's like.

“We live our best lives for them. They can't, so we have too. That's our responsibility being alive or that's how I come to believe the good lord knows. Don't let the good die with your partner Karl. Life is too short”, she said, smiling.

“You're right. I can't disagree. I hope those who are broken like myself can one day mend the pain, but me no. But here's a picture of her”, Karl said, pulling out a picture of himself with his partner.

“Oh Karl, she was beautiful. Here I'll show my Kenan”, smiled Josephine, pulling out her phone.

“He looked like a good man Josephine”, smiled Karl, as he looked at the picture of Kenan in his blue ceremonial uniform.

"He was the way I raised him to be", said Josephine, in a proud tone.

"What is your stance honestly on people", asked Karl, in his usual curious tone.

"What do you mean baby", asked Josephine, a little confused.

"You think you have a pretty good sense of people. You can get a good or a bad feeling when talking with them", he continued to ask.

"I would like to think I do, but honestly with how crazy the world is, who knows. Hell I could be a monster who's killed before and you may never know. People are just too unpredictable these days", she said, with a saddened tone.

"I couldn't see you hurting anyone who didn't deserve it", stated Karl, giggling.

"Damn straight, you fucked around and found out with me. Pardon my potty mouth", giggled Josephine in a playful manner.

"It's a shame we couldn't talk more Josephine. I see our next stop is coming up. You're always a delight", Karl smiled, as he stuck out his hand for a handshake.

"It's been a pleasure young man now, put that hand away and let Josephine give you a hug", she said, opening her arms and wrapping them around Karl for a quick hug before gathering her things to leave as she got to her feet. "Keep your chin up kid and you'll mend just fine", she continued.

Josephine turned her back to Karl as she grabbed hold of one of the bars in the car to keep her balance. The monorail started to slow down and people inside got ready to exit and go about their lives. Josephine felt a finger tap her on the shoulder as she turned expecting to see Karl. It took a moment to sink in as though time stood still. There was a knife pierced into her throat and she no longer could see the face of the man who was politely talking with her mere seconds ago. Someone who kicked back sharing the vibes of music with a stranger. The look in his eyes was empty. There was no longer a person nor even a soul that could be seen as though a veil lifted from this true monster's face as blood began to pour from her fatal wound. She could faintly hear a whisper from his mouth.

"I know you didn't expect it, but hope your reunion with Kenan will bring you peace my friend", he said, in a monotone cold voice.

Josephine didn't hear the screams of terror as Karl withdrew a second blade as he pulled out the one from her throat. Everything was in slow motion as Karl began slashing and cutting down every gothamite within reach, while Josephine felt everything go cold in her body as she collapsed to the floor. She started to fade and everything got colder as she saw more people drop to the ground while others tried to fight back. Karl displayed strength that wasn't human

and at one point a male passenger withdrew a pistol and opened fired on Karl several times to no effect as Karl was already on top of the guy stabbing him to death. Josephine drifted and her vision faded. Despite all the horror and violence a face flashed in her mind of her son. A wave of peace came over her before it went black and she never opened her eyes again. The monorail came to a stop as the car opened with survivors clamoring their way out of the gory blood soaked vehicle making citizens who were about to enter the vehicle witness this terrifying scene flee for their safety as a few wounded survivors though bleeding out attempted to crawl their way to safety as blood trailed behind them. One survivor who crawled her way out of the vehicle was on the verge of death when Karl stepped out covered in blood as his hands and forearms were drenched. He saw the woman trying desperately to get away as he stood over her and put a knee in her back holding her in place as he grabbed her by the hair as she cried and pleaded before he swiftly slit her throat. He put his switchblades back in his hoodie pocket and pulled out an envelope that contained a letter and a usb and laid it on the woman's back. He looked up noticing a camera and waved pleasantly before walking away from the crime scene as sirens were heard closing in on his location.

Not long after Batman and Robin drove away Stagg's building, they noticed the bat signal in the sky and headed towards the city to find out why. Batman pressed a button on the computer screen in the batmobile that called Gordon. Robin looked at Batman curious to find out what was discussed with Stagg and whether he was able to get any immediate answers to what they are up against.

"So boss, did we get anything from Stagg", she asked, curiously hoping that they know something that could help stop the killing and the turmoil.

"Yes, Stagg gave me a name", Batman said, in a gruff stern tone.

"He did? What is it? " Robin asked, she was shocked she could finally know the name of the one who killed her family. And if they know their name maybe they'll have enough information to defeat them.

"His name is Basil Karlo. That's all he was able to tell me. He was terrified to even utter the name. As though an old ghost came up from the grave to haunt him. Unfortunately he didn't have a clue on how to stop his creation", said Batman grimly.

"Wait...Stagg created the thing we're trying to take down", asked Carrie, in a frustrated tone.

"Yes", said Batman, focusing on getting back to Gotham.

"Basil Karlo. Okay it's a start to taking him down", said Robin, enthusiastically as though their odds have swung in their favor, but she could hear in his voice and see it on his face. This threat could possibly be beyond them which brought down her enthusiasm almost immediately as Gordon's voice appeared.

“Batman, head over to the 53rd street monorail station. It’s bad. Really bad. And there’s something here for both of us”, said Gordon, with despair in his voice.

“Be there soon Jim we have a big lead on our culprit”, said Batman, retaining his stern gruff tone.

“Thank god. Let’s just get this guy and end this shit. I’m glad you got the information, but be ready when you get here Batman. See you soon”, said Gordon, as he hung up the call.

“I’ve never heard Gordon sound like that before”, said Robin in a worried tone.

“I have”, said Batman, remaining strong and unphased in his tone.

Batman parked the batmobile in a nearby alley way close to the crime scene setting it on camouflage mode before both vigilantes used their grappling hooks making it to a rooftop that had a clear vintage point to glide towards Gordon’s location which was on the opposite side of where the crime actually took place. Gordon was busy instructing his officers on their individual tasks so the crime scene was under control. He noticed Batman and Robin as they glided and landed in front of him.

“Batman it’s good you’re here but she shouldn’t be”, said Gordon in a concerned tone.

“What do you mean Jim”, asked Batman curiously.

“Batman, it was a massacre. Over nine people were stabbed to death at the scene. Three more died on their way to the hospital. And four others are in critical condition. I know you have young people at your side sometimes. God knows why. But you do. And this crime scene, it isn’t right to have her see it”, said Gordon frustrated, as though the father in him had to speak his mind.

“I understand. We won’t go near where the crime took place, but I would like to see what was left for us”, Batman requested sternly.

“This was found on one of the victims”, said Gordon, pulling out the envelope that contained a letter and usb from his coat pocket before handing it to Batman so he could read the letter.

Batman took the letter from Gordon and looked it over and read: “It’s time for my debut and you are all welcome. Invitation is on the usb”.

“I guess he’s just as ready to finish this as we are”, said Gordon, as he pulled out his pipe, lit a match, and began to let out a few puffs of smoke.

“Or this is just the beginning of something much worse”, said Batman, in a cold dark tone. “Let me see that usb”, he continued, as he stuck out his hand.

Gordon handed him the usb as Batman opened up the compartment on his gauntlet and plugged the usb into the gauntlets computer, which made a small digitized screen appear a few inches hovering above the gauntlet. A play button appeared on the screen on the gauntlet and Batman pressed it, which played on the digitized screen with the video's volume at max so they could all hear as Detectives Harvey Bullock and Renee Montoya also took notice and approached to watch. Everyone gathered around Batman to watch as a thin dark curly haired man appeared on screen. He was good looking, with striking features, light green eyes that looked vacant and empty of humanity, wearing a gray hoodie, and sitting in front a desk with a dark background where you could barely see images on the wall that were too blurred to make out. The only light was on his face. He smiled and opened his mouth to speak.

"Hello Gotham, my name is Basil Karlo. But since this city has a neesh for creating monsters I'll go by the name *"Clayface"*. Some of you might recognize me and some of you won't. I used to be an actor most famous for a cop show called *"Case by Case "*. And then fell to the wayside, forced to do commercials for Stagg Industries to make ends meet. When the very chemicals I was contractually obligated to use to advertise Stagg's products are part of the reason I am the way I am today. But it doesn't excuse that I've done some awful things. I killed that girl at the overlook. I stole from Penguin and murdered his men. I've committed multiple heinous crimes where quite a number of people died. And it's all thanks to Stagg Industries. But it's okay I had a little bit of retribution for demolishing their facility in Bludhaven as a start. This message that I'm presenting before you is not just for Gotham's citizens. It's for you Batman, it's for you Commissioner Gordon, and you Amanda Waller. Like the letter provided states, this is an invitation to my debut to the world. Yes I sent a copy of this message to the local news outlets. Batman, I want you and Robin to come to the Gotham Pier on Friday at 8:00 p.m. Meet me at the Haunted House of Mirrors attraction, so we can have a talk. Commissioner Gordon, you and your officers are welcome to feed yourselves to the meat grinder when the fighting starts. And Amanda Waller. If you think you have any sense of control think again. You can call down whatever storm or hurricane you want, but what's coming is inevitable, so please try your hand as well. All are welcome. And to the news outlets I promise your helicopters will be unharmed to record everything at your leisure. I want everyone to see the incredible things that will happen. And Batman if you don't follow my instructions on this video. I have over a dozen buildings in the city rigged to blow, so please be courteous and make sure you and Robin are on time. To prove I'm not bluffing. At some point, somewhere, a building will detonate. Could happen at any time, so be on the lookout. And be on your guard. And to give a little reassurance for Gotham's citizens, long as Batman follows my instructions none of you will be harmed any longer. So, Batman, please try not to let them down. See you Friday", said Basil Karlo as the video ended.

For a brief moment no one spoke. Batman removed the usb from his gauntlet and shut the compartment as he started to walk away with Robin following behind him, Gordon opened his mouth to speak.

"Batman, we have your back. We will be there with you", he said, without fear or doubt as he saw Batman and Robin begin to head out.

Batman stopped with Robin right beside him as he turned his head to utter two words. "Thanks Jim", before he and Robin fired their grappling hooks and left the scene.

Gordon turned back to his people who all had nervous and fearful looks on their faces.

"Everyone. I know we're scared. I know this threat is cocky, like he has us under his thumb. But I'll be damned before I let the GCPD cower before one criminal. We didn't standby when Victor Fries tried to freeze Gotham. We didn't back down when the Joker started his war with Batman killing our fellow officers in the process. This is just another battle that we as Gotham City's shield will endure. I won't force anyone to be there at the Gotham Pier on Friday, but I'm going to protect my family and my city. Enough is enough. Anyone who wants to join me in this fight is welcome. Spread the word", said Gordon emboldened as his officers including detectives Bullock and Montoya were all on board to join the battle of Gotham Pier.

While Gordon was bolstering his people Batman and Robin got back in the batmobile. Batman activated the computer and spoke Basil Karlo's name. Robin noticed on the screen numerous files on Basil Karlo appeared.

"Computer pinpoint Basil Karlo's address into the gps", Batman spoke, as the computer brought up the location on the GPS screen, then started the engine of the batmobile and headed towards the location.

"Boss, what if he's there? We still don't know how to stop him", said Robin, looking at Batman in a concerned tone.

"He won't be there. He can be reckless and egotistical due to having zero fear of being harmed or caught, but he's also proven to be careful as he's kept his identity a secret up to this point. Revealing his name was a bold move but one he knew would do absolutely nothing to help in our efforts to catch him. Robin I need you to keep a level head and fight smart, if possible from a distance. The battle ahead will be one of the most difficult we've ever faced. Right now Clayface has us backed into a corner with his bomb threat. Follow all my orders to the level. Break any of them and you're fired. Understood", said Batman, in a stern fatherly tone.

"Copy that boss", said Robin, thinking to herself what if she loses control in the fighting. This monster killed Michelle and Lucas. Can she trust herself to keep composure?

A little time went by and they arrived at the apartment building with Basil Karlo's address. Robin followed Batman's lead as they used their grappling hooks to make their way to Basil's apartment. Batman was able to open the apartment window and entered. They were greeted to an unsettling sight. The walls of the apartment were covered in images cut from magazines and printouts of faces from different races, different expressions, both male and female. Thousands of pictures of all different kinds of body types, hair styles, facial hair styles, eye colors, age ranges, skin pigments, details down to the last mole or liver spot. Images and pictures of scars

and medical procedures that could alter the body's look. All these pictures were stapled, taped, or glued to the walls. Mounds of stacked magazines and pictures littered across the apartment. There was no furniture in the apartment except for the desk and chair Basil used to film his introduction for the city and Batman. In the center of the dining room was a full body mirror. As they looked around the room Robin came across the bedroom door that had a sign that wrote *"My Fears Made Real"*. Robin turned to Batman and spoke.

"Boss, if he learned to master the human form here. With his abilities do you think he can learn to master to become something else", she asked, fearfully before putting her hand on the door handle.

"Robin, wait", said Batman as he approached the door.

Robin moved her hand off the handle as Batman did a full search of the frame and checked for any possible traps left behind. Once he finished checking the door he grabbed the handle jiggling it a bit to discover it was locked. He noticed this wasn't a door with a lock he could pick, so he reached into his utility belt pulling out a canister spraying a translucent gel on the handle.

"Get back", he said as they both cleared away from the door when he pulled out a small remote pressing the button. A small pop was heard as the sound of the metal door knob falling to ground could be heard as the door opened.

Both Batman and Robin approached the room when they entered. Batman could make out a light with a dangling pull switch. Batman tugged on the pull switch turning on the light. A spine tingling chill went up Robin's back as her heart began to pump so hard, it felt like it would burst through her chest. They glared upon the dimly lit horror of images made from black chalk and black ink of beings spawned from a mind sunk deep into the abyss. Robin stared into the black dreaded eyes of eldritch beings etched onto the white paper attached to the walls, stuck to the rooms ceiling and many even around the floor. Beings with many heads with different expressions, beings made of bizarre masses beyond description, one charcoal sketch had a being with a wide toothy grin and elongated neck, torso and limbs with sharp looking elongated fingers. Forms of body horror that could only be described as alien and yet all thought up from the mind of a warped shape-shifting psychopath. Everywhere you look you're gazing upon the forms of creatures that should stay in the mind and buried there to never be gazed upon by another's eyes. One drawing specifically stuck out to Batman. One that he recognized as Robin uttered the courage to speak.

"Batman do you think he practiced.....becoming these", she asked, unable to hide her fear in her voice.

"This whole place is a sanctuary to what he is now. A place to allow his mind to be free and enlighten whatever inner ideals to take shape both mentally and in his case physically. These represent all his internal turmoils and fears taking shape. Who knows how much time he spent perfecting his ability to mold himself into whatever form he desired or feared. But this one. I

know this one. I knew the name Clayface sounded familiar, but this sketch only confirms it", Batman said, in a curious tone.

He approached a specific drawing that was stapled to the wall. It was an image of what appeared to be a man wearing a large round hat, a suit and a cape. The man was wielding a cane in one hand and a knife in the other that appeared to be withdrawn from the cane. It was clear now that Batman knew where Basil Karlo got his inspiration to be the untraceable killer. He looked over to Robin and spoke.

"Come on Robin we got what we need from here", said Batman, as though this case just made a lot more sense then it did before.

"Wait, we're done. What did you figure out? Did you figure out how to beat him", Robin started asking frantically, confused as to what Batman was able to figure out.

Batman didn't respond as he exited the apartment window with Robin following behind him. They made their way back to the batmobile as Batman once again activated the computer and started engines taking off towards the manor. Batman spoke to the bat computer.

"Computer do a search on the film *"Clayface"* and download a copy into our server for later viewing", he said as the computer brought up an image of an old 1950s film with the man that looked eerily similar to the person that Batman noticed in one of Basil's sketches.

"Did I miss something? What does a movie have to do with taking down our enemy", asked Robin, in a confused tone.

"It's insight Robin. The more you learn and understand your suspect the better your chances of finding them and stopping them. What we call insanity makes perfect sense to them. Lost in their delusions we try to understand why. And hopefully find an answer we can comprehend. We use that answer to find them and stop them. I used to simply inflict pain upon those I deemed deserving. Some did. But others simply needed someone to reach out and show them they could have a chance to come to the light. Some do. I changed my methods to help those who needed someone to save them from themselves. Others choose to fall into the abyss with open arms free falling into their madness", explained Batman.

"You mean like the Joker", asked Robin, with a somber tone.

"Yes. And like Basil Karlo is doing now", Batman, in a tone that carried more weight than Robin can understand.

"Batman, can I tell you something?", Robin asked.

"Of course", Batman said.

"I remember two years ago. When you had your war with him. The Joker. It was scary. It was probably the only time in my life my parents actually checked on my well being and told me to live with Michelle and Lucas for a time and thankfully my friends were able to take me in. I remember the smoke coming from all over the city. How you, Nightwing, Batgirl, Robin and the GCPD fought so hard to save Gotham. How people were going missing and getting killed daily. I'll never forget seeing Joker on the news. That face with that soulless smile. When he had Robin and.....executed him on television. And you disappeared for a few days after that. I thought one of two things happened to you. Either you gave up hope and couldn't fight anymore. Or you were planning to kill him. I have never been so scared thinking what if Joker had won. I always thought to myself, at that moment, Batman needed a Robin by his side. When you returned to stop him from nuking Gotham in a cloud of smile gas. I could tell from seeing you in prior circumstances losing Robin had an effect on you, but you saved everyone you could regardless. That was the moment I decided to become Robin. I didn't want you to have to fight alone even though you didn't know me. I knew if I fought and trained hard enough one day maybe I'd be exactly where I am now. Protecting people with you. I'll never regret choosing this life and being your Robin", said Robin, giving Batman a small reassuring smile as Batman didn't say a word for a few moments.

"You're a good soldier Carrie. Thank you", said Batman, in a calm tone as they continued towards the batcave.

In Another Part of Gotham.....

Basil Karlo was sitting on a rooftop of an abandoned building on the outskirts of Gotham in his gray hoodie and black pants as he heard footsteps approaching from behind him. He turned to see Plastique walking towards him with a cold hateful look on her face as he smiled, opening his mouth to speak.

"I'm actually happy you showed up. Just surprised you haven't taken this opportunity to fire a few more shots at me. I know you're still angry", he said in a pleasant tone.

"I'm not angry, BK. Anger isn't what I'm feeling at all. What I'm feeling is something you're incapable of rationalizing anymore. I guess it's a perk of not being human", said Plastique, in a cold vengeful tone.

"You're not wrong. I would like you to use a new code name for me. The city of Gotham has a new monster in town. Before me was Mr. Freeze. And I think it's only fitting that my name should reflect what inspired my new life. Your new code name for me is Clayface. Not the most nuanced moniker, but it fits", Clayface said smiling.

"Clayface huh", said Plastique, in an unenthused tone.

"It's what I gave the news outlets", said Clayface, still smiling.

"Whatever floats your boat BK. You know what you're doing is stupid? Ever since we came to Gotham you've been out of control. The random massacres, the attack on the hospital, and now this insanity of challenging Batman, the GCPD, and Waller all at once. You're not a god Basil, you're a freak. You really think this is what's going to get Amanda out in the open for me to kill her", asked Plastique in a confused and frustrated tone.

"To kill Waller no. What's going to happen will be too chaotic and I don't think you want a random explosion to do the job. I figured you wanted her death to be by your own hand. Close and very personal. Friday's events will be more of a warning shot. And I have something else in mind. But I need you to rig a couple buildings for me since as of right now my threat on the city is currently a bluff. Which honestly works in our favor cause right now they're probably searching buildings for bombs as we speak. They'll have the belief the buildings they've checked are safe and clear only for us to rig it later. So I'm relying on you to make my threat a reality in case things go south on Friday. Also, have some of the men on standby with their RPGs. Take this and study it", said Clayface, pulling out a brown folder from his hoodie and handing it to Plastique who opened the folder and started reading through the pages of the plan.

"Holy shit. Holy fucking shit. You really are out of your mind. But shit, this may work. I'm curious to how you came up with this", asked Plastique, calming from her previous vengeful behavior into a more enraptured tone and started becoming more focused.

"Hey, sometimes entertainment has some pretty good ideas. Study it to the letter and get the men ready. Make sure we are prepared and have all the equipment necessary so it's full proof. And I need one particular request fulfilled so, one specific individual does not get involved in the fighting Friday. I'm all for chaos, but when it's controlled. No need for any additional fuel when the bonfire is big enough. So can we call it a truce until the job is done", smiled Clayface, in a calm, quiet and pleasant tone like having a simple casual conversation as he sticks his hand out for a shake.

"Truce. I'll put all my disdain for you aside. For now, let's put this plan to action. I've been itching to blow some shit up anyway. And most importantly finally end Waller's fucking life", said Plastique, smiling for the first time in what seemed like eons.

"I agree. Let's make Friday a very special day for Gotham", said Clayface, turning back to the city continuing to smile pleasantly.

Chapter 12: The Wall and The Guest

Morning had arrived at Wayne Manor and Carrie was dressed and ready for school. She made her way down to the cave to check on Bruce who had the Stagg files on one screen of the batcomputer and an old 1950s black and white film playing on the batcomputer. She approached Bruce and spoke.

"Is this the movie you were talking about", she asked curiously, as a scene of a man and a woman walking along the sidewalk at night.

"Yes, Basil Karlo etched the Clayface killer of this movie in his fear room. Just getting an idea of what aspect of the character inspired his current actions", said Bruce with a focused look as he gazed at the screen.

"Well, hopefully it'll help us in figuring out how to attack him mentally if we can't beat him physically", said Carrie, in a concerned tone as the scene got romantic on the screen.

Carrie and Bruce watched as the couple made their way to a park and began kissing, before the scene took a dark turn when the woman caressed the man's face. To her horror the man's face revealed to be a mask. The woman grabs the man's face, ripping off the mask revealing the horrifying melted face underneath as the Clayface killer pulls out a knife with the camera view closing up on the woman's reaction as she's stabbed to death screaming.

"Were people really disturbed by this", she asked, looking awkwardly at the screen.

"Back then yes this was horrifying to people. Karlo clearly saw himself in this character and became his own twisted version. Something far deeper and darker", said Bruce, as though studying every shot of the film.

"We learn anything from the Stagg files", Carrie asked curiously.

"Still doing some digging. But as of right now, nothing that helps us bring down Karlo. Stagg did say that he was unable to figure out a way to replicate the mutation that warped Karlo's DNA into Clayface. Right now the abundance of questions out way any answers we've discovered", said Bruce, in a quiet frustrated tone still watching the movie.

"Well, I need to head out but keep me in the loop if you discover anything new", asked Carrie, as she left the cave heading back up to the manor where Alfred was waiting to take her to school.

Carrie headed back up to the manor as Bruce continued to observe the film with a scene of the movie's detective talking with the chief of police.

"We found a letter on the victim", said the detective.

“What does it say?”, the chief asked worriedly.

“To my dear authoritative interlopers,

You pursue me with no concrete method to track me. I have killed time and time again yet you ceaselessly continue your fruitless efforts in bringing me into custody to face justice. Eventually you will learn when facing an untraceable killer as myself that only I designate when our confrontation will occur. This world is my playground. And when I have grown bored with the toys I break you will share in the sand box with me so we can play our final game. Until that time comes, continue your pathetic attempts to find me as you follow the trail of blood leading to the end. I can assure you Detective Bridges. When we play whether your department takes me down or not, I will leave you disfigured and crippled so all you can do is watch as I kill your whole world before this is over. Now in the meantime be a good boy and remember to say your prayers and kiss your mother goodbye”, said Detective Bridges, with a fearful look on his face.

.....At the Gotham City Police Department

Commissioner Gordon was in his office finishing up the paperwork from the monorail massacre. As he got up from his desk to put away the files, when he noticed a picture of Barbara Gordon and a sad look came over his face as his cell phone began to ring. He pulled it out to his surprise and answered to hear Barbara's voice.

“Dad, I saw the news this morning. Are you okay? I know how you are but you can't accept his invitation”, said Barbara, her voice sounded tired and worried.

“Barbara. I know you're worried. But if you saw what this monster has done to the people here. I can't let this go. Even if the fight is one sided. I can not keep letting people die to this thing on my watch. And you know I won't be alone. Batman and Robin will be right there on the front lines with me”, said Gordon, keeping his calm tone showing no sign of how nervous he really was.

“Wait, what did you say”, asked Barbara, confused.

“Batman and Robin will be with me. And hunny, this isn't the first time nor the last some freak comes out of the woodwork to threaten Gotham. We've handled these threats time and time again. We have always endured”, answered Gordon.

“Dad. I know how strong you are. You and Batman have always put yourselves on the line to save everyone you can. But this time. Just let Batman handle it”, Barbara said, in an almost pleading tone. “This person or thing you're up against, it defeated Nightwing here in Bludhaven. This is not just some freak. This is not just another costumed villain, this is something else. I know you won't listen to me, but just listen to whatever your gut says on this one, please listen to it. Just this once dad. Don't fight. Stay safe until me and Dick arrive, we'll

be there in a couple days”, continued Barabara, trying her best to convince Gordon to not fight, while also trying to keep her composure about the news that Batman has a new Robin.

“Stay in Bludhaven Barbara don’t come here”, said Gordon, in a worried demanding tone.

“You know you can’t stop me dad. I get my stubbornness from you. See you soon”, said Barbara hanging up.

“Dammit”, said Gordon, slumping back in his chair looking up at the ceiling fan spinning feeling the air blowing down on his face. “What the hell am I doing”, he quietly asked himself before hearing commotion from outside his office.

Voices began to get louder outside Gordon’s office as multiple footsteps and voices began to get closer to his office. He got to his feet as Harvey Bullock opened the door looking very nervous as he opened his mouth to speak.

“Heya commish, the government has arrived to talk with ya”, he said, quickly and nervously.

Harvey was suddenly pushed out of the way by a man dressed like secret service in a black suit with a military haircut and an ear piece as a dark skinned woman in a navy blue suit, with short black hair, and a scour look on her face entered the office. She turned her head to her agent and spoke.

“I need privacy Agent Murray”, she said as she took a seat in front of Gordon’s desk as the agent moved Harvey who struggled against the agent before the office door was closed.

“Hello Amanda, how are things in the White House?”, asked Gordon, sitting back in his chair.

“Complicated. As I understand it things here in Gotham have also become complicated. What have you been doing as this city’s Commissioner? Do you have a solution to this problem we have here”, asked Amanda Waller, in a cold sore tone.

“As of right now Batman is going to do what was requested of him. While he confronts Basil Karlo, me and my people will evacuate what designate as the red zone and block off certain streets making it easier to keep bystanders away blocking off the Gotham Pier. And if this thing tries to run for it we will do what we can to hold it back long enough for Batman to take it down. We’re still figuring out a containment solution”, said Gordon, keeping his composure.

“Do I look stupid to you Commissioner, because I don’t wanna believe you’re trying to convince me that’s what you’ve come up with for something as dangerous as this. Have you watched the footage? Have you seen what this thing can do? Have you learned a practical way to hurt it? These are crucial answers that are required to make a successful operation necessary to stop this thing”, said Amanda, in a calm tone. “I didn’t think you were so incompetent you’d neglect to create an actual plan that can capture or kill this thing who’s killed

countless people. Something that also threatens our national security. Yes, you heard me right. A threat to our country's security. Did you stop to think that this thing can become anyone in the government and do untold damage to our international reputation let alone implode our very democracy? Can you imagine the ramifications if this thing acted as the president and got the launch codes and decides humanity is beneath it and causes a nuclear war? Commissioner Gordon, as of now this thing calling itself Basil Karlo is a top priority target. In just a short period of time he has become the greatest threat not just in Gotham, not just in the United States, but to humanity. The president is taking this seriously hence why he sent me. Basil Karlo's invitation on the news isn't what brought me here, but orders from the president himself. So, what I need from you is to get me a meeting with Batman tonight. I know you can do that much and from there we will come up with a real game plan. And I expect full cooperation from you and your department. Is that clear", Amanda continued.

"Crystal clear Waller ", said Gordon, biting his tongue out of pure frustration. Everything Waller said couldn't be denied and he was angry because he knew there was no plan to contain Karlo let alone stop him.

.....Gotham Gymnastics Studio

After Carrie finished school she was brought to the gymnastics studio by Alfred, but before Carrie got out of the vehicle opening the door she heard Alfred speak.

"Are you alright Ms. Kelley", he asked.

"Yeah, Alfred I'm fine I'll see you after practice okay", Carrie said, giving him a sweet smile.

"Very well. I'll pick you up after practice Ms. Kelley", said Alfred, giving her a small smile as he watched her head into the building as he knew something was very wrong before driving off.

When Carrie entered the building she noticed something she didn't expect which she wasn't prepared for. A picture of Michelle in her gymnastics attire smiling with large colorful letters above and below the picture "*In Loving Memory of our Dear Friend Michelle*". Carrie couldn't control the tears that formed in her eyes. She hadn't seen her friend's face since the night she was killed. Carrie took a moment to sit up against the wall by the picture as she started crying looking up at the ceiling as she started talking to herself.

"I'm so sorry. I don't know what to do Michelle", she cried, as images of that night when Crystal attacked them, images of Basil's fear room, his confident smile on the invitation video, it was all flashing through her mind, overwhelming her. "I want to make it alright. Make up for my failure. I don't want to lose. Not to him. Not again. But I don't know how we're going to be able to beat him. Even with Batman and the police. All of us together. What if we're not enough? What if he kills us all and that's the end? I just hope you'll forgive me when we meet again. Please, Michelle. Please forgive me", she continued, getting into a fetal position burying her head in her arms, still sitting up against the wall as tears continued to stream down her face.

A nearby door opened and Coach Myers entered seeing Carrie crying close to Michelle's picture. She knew immediately as she came over and sat next to her. She put her arm around Carrie letting her have her moment as the door opened again with the other girls from the floor all started to come in giving Carrie a hug or patting her on the shoulder in reassurance that it's okay as they show their support of her.

....Back at Wayne Manor

Alfred was making his way down to the batcave where he could hear very powerful punches being thrown on the punching bag in the workout area of the cave. He walked over to see Bruce pounding on the bag out of pure frustration. Every punch landed just seemed to add fuel to Bruce's anger rather than relief. Alfred noticed the blood appearing under the tape as he spoke.

"MASTER BRUCE", he shouted, making Bruce slow down and stop hitting the bag. "Master Bruce, you need to rest. You've been researching for hours. You haven't had proper sleep in days, I understand the situation in Gotham is dire. But you won't do Gotham any good when you're collapsing from exhaustion", Alfred continued.

"I know Alfred, I just need to find the answer. All I know right now is the only thing that has had any effect on Clayface is electricity, but it's not full proof. I have Lucius developing some weapons for our fight, but I'm not convinced it'll be enough", Bruce said, breathing heavily with a tired voice. The batphone began to ring as Bruce answered to hear Gordon speak.

"Batman, I have something important. Tonight, Amanda Waller wants to meet at the top of the GCPD building by the bat signal to come up with a plan to take on Clayface. She wants you here when the signal is shining in the sky", said Gordon.

"Okay Jim, I'll be there", Bruce said, as the bat phone augmented his voice.

"Batman, be careful with Waller. Whatever she comes up with more likely has some backhanded tactic underneath", said Gordon, in a suspicious tone.

"Of course she does", said Bruce, unphased as he hung up. "Alfred, I think it's time I took your advice. Looks like more trouble has arrived. That or maybe Waller may have a solution we haven't thought up yet", he continued as he started heading up to the manor.

"Very good sir. Let's get those knuckles iced and bandaged first", said Alfred, in a relieved tone following behind him.

Later that evening after Bruce woke up from his sleep, got dressed in his under armor attire before putting on the batsuit, he went down to the kitchen where Carrie was eating dinner provided by Alfred as a pot of coffee was being made for him. Carrie paused from eating her

chicken, asparagus, and salad looking over to Bruce with a small smile as he noticed her utility belt on the table.

“Hey boss, you sleep okay”, she asked.

“I did Carrie thank you. We have a meeting with Gordon and Amanda Waller tonight. When you’re finished, suit up”, he said, sitting at the kitchen table by Carrie as Alfred brought over Bruce’s coffee.

“Roger that”, she said as she continued eating and watching the news on the small television.

“Just the way you like it sir”, said Alfred, handing Bruce the cup.

“Thanks Alfred”, said Bruce, in an appreciative tone.

As Bruce took a sip the front doorbell was rung, which made Bruce, Alfred, and Carrie stop what they were doing. Shocked, anyone would be at the front door, let alone on the property. Alfred simply made his way to the door to answer it leaving the kitchen as Bruce was drinking his coffee as Carrie watched Alfred eyes following him until he was out the door and gone. Carrie then looked over to Bruce to speak.

“Ummmm, Bruce. I don’t recall guests ever coming here. Are you not concerned who it could be”, she asked, in a worried tone.

“Not at all. I figured they would show up sooner or later”, Bruce said, calmly as his phone rang with Alfred on the other line.

“Yes Alfred? Okay I’ll meet him in the cave”, said Bruce, hanging up the phone taking another sip of coffee before getting up. “Carrie, stay here and finish your dinner. I’ll tell you when to come down to the cave understood”, he continued.

“Yeah, Bruce. I understand, but if I hear anything weird I will rush down there”, Carrie said, with no hesitation in her voice.

“It’ll be fine Carrie. I’ll call you down soon”, said Bruce, with a small smile as he left the kitchen.

Bruce made his way to the den where the bookshelf was already activated, so he entered the stairwell down to the cave. Bruce took his time finishing his coffee on the way before reaching the bottom of the stairs stepping into the light of the batcave. Bruce saw two individuals talking by the bat-computer. Bruce made his way over to Alfred and Dick Grayson talking. They stopped once Bruce was close enough.

“Hello, Dick”, said Bruce, in a calm tone with a casual demeanor.

“Bruce”, Dick retorted.

“I will leave you two to your discussion. And please if you’re going to get physical this time do it where the mess will be minimal”, said Alfred as he exited the batcave. As Bruce and Dick glanced at each other. Dick unable to keep his inner anger hidden.

“Look I’m not here to start shit with you Bruce. I just wanna know where this new Robin is so I can speak to her when we are done”, he said, keeping his composure.

“Whatever business you have here Dick, stays between you and I. Carrie has no stake in our differences. I know there’s much we need to work through. I put you and Barbara through hell. You have every right to be upset. I pushed you all so hard, because I wanted you both to be able to survive”, said Bruce, as a hint of shame could be heard in his voice.

“And Jason? What about him? Jesus Bruce it’s only been two years and you already replaced him? Putting another kid in danger for your impossible mission that you and I both know will never end”, said Dick, as he raised his voice angrily. “When that girl dies painfully to one of your enemies or by some random criminal are you going to replace her like you did Jason”, he continued, shouting louder.

“I understand you’re angry with me, but I’ll only say it one more time. Keep her out of it. I’ve taken full responsibility for what happened to Jason. I know I didn’t give you a childhood you needed. I was still so lost in my mission I thought I was helping you the only way I knew how. I know now I didn’t with any of you. My approach with you three was wrong. And I’m sorry. Sorry for bringing you into this life and fighting a war you never wanted”, said Bruce, apologetically.

“As mad as I am with you Bruce. I won’t deny you made us stronger and we will never condemn you for that. We are long in the fight and ready to put our lives on the line. But the girl. You can’t make her part of this anymore. She needs a normal life. Or as normal as it can be at this point”, said Dick, in a quieter, more composed tone.

“Dick, I never made her Robin. I didn’t seek out a new protege. She came to me. She was Robin before we met. Carrie made herself a soldier. I know you find this hard to believe ,but I almost turned her away and even almost went as far as removing the costume to burn it. But the look in her eye. There was no denying that look. So, I trained her and made her my partner”, said Bruce, in a calm proud tone, but he saw a cold fury come over Dick.

“Trained her huh? Where is she? I would like to talk with her “, Dick asked, with a calm demeanor, but Bruce could see the rage burning in Dick’s eyes. He knew his words weren’t enough. There was only one way this issue could resolve itself. He has to trust Carrie.

“She’s in the kitchen”, Bruce said, in a regretful tone.

Dick didn't say another word as he made his way out of the cave up to the kitchen where Carrie finished her dinner. Carrie brought her plate over to the sink and started washing and rinsing out her dish. She turned her head to listen to the news as they spoke about Basil Karlo.

"Good evening Gotham, this is Vicki Vale. It's been a few days since Basil Karlo, who's calling himself Clayface, made his threat against Batman and the GCPD, along with Amanda Waller who has been disclosed as a worker for the Pentagon. With Friday only being two days away all of Gotham has made their concerns known as to whether or not Clayface will keep his word and refrain from bombing the city even with Batman making good on his end of the deal showing up with Robin at 8:00 p.m. The GCPD has been working endlessly to convince residents of high rise apartments in the surrounding area of the Gotham Pier to evacuate taking Clayface's threat very seriously", said Vicki Vale, as her voice drifted with a different sound catching Carrie's attention.

Due to recent circumstances Carrie made it a point to practice and hone her senses. She could hear footsteps making their way to her location and she knows the sound of Alfreds loafers when the heel hits the floor. And Bruce wasn't wearing anything that would make noise. Carrie pulled out her slingshot from the back of her pants, ever since Crystal tried to kill her twice she always has her slingshot and a number of special pellets on her at all times. Whoever this was, will not be getting the drop on her as she pulled out one of her round marble sized pellets. A young man entered the kitchen. He was handsome, had a strong athletic build, with jet black hair like Bruce. He was wearing a black jacket, black pants, black gloves and a black shirt. He looked directly at her with time feeling as though it came to a halt. Carrie could instantly tell this person, maybe someone known to the household, but he's here not as a friend. This person's intent was clear before anyone made a move as Carrie looked from Dick to the table with her utility belt. Dick swiftly reaches down to his utility belt grabbing a custom version of the batarang. Carrie didn't hesitate throwing a pellet to the ground below her feet, unleashing a huge burst of white smoke engulfing her entire being as Dick tossed a batarang into the cloud of smoke. Before he had time to react two more bursts of white smoke went off back to back. The first in the middle of the kitchen and the other right at Dick's feet. Before he could react he was blasted in the chest with a burst pellet knocking him away from the kitchen entrance onto his back. With a quick maneuver Dick used his agility to get right back to his feet before another burst of white smoke in front of him as he backed off when two batarangs were flung at him from the smoke. Dick had his armor under his outfit, which allowed him to take the burst pellet to the chest nearly unscathed, which also allowed him to block the batarangs with ease using his gauntlets. A grappling hook was seen fired at the second level balcony from the smoke as Carrie tried to get some distance, but Dick easily threw one of his custom batarangs cutting her line making her fall forward to the ground on her stomach. Dick opened his mouth to speak.

"Is this all he taught you? To simply distract, run, and evade? What are you gonna do when you face off with Clayface? You clearly are no match for me and I lost in a hand to hand fight

with him”, said Dick, in a frustrated tone as Carrie got up from her stomach to her knees as she reached for the back of her utility belt.

“That’s the thing. You survived only one encounter with him. I survived multiple”, she said smiling deviously, in a confident tone as pulled out a circular device that attached to her wrist lighting up making an electrical hum.

Dick realized he had to move quickly when Carrie hit a button as the device fired dozens of small batarangs as he used his extraordinary agility flipping and spinning, while dodging countless projectiles flying all around him. The device around Carrie’s wrist quickly ran out of ammo as Dick removed his jacket due to it getting penetrated by multiple small batarangs, dropping it to the ground as he got into a combat stance. Carrie removed the device from around her wrist leaving it on the ground as she too got into a combat stance. Dick waited as though expecting Carrie to rush in with a flurry of attacks, but after a bit it was clear she wasn’t trained the same way as Jason nor had his explosive personality. This girl seems to be almost the complete opposite. She is patient. Fight more from a distance and evade an all out confrontation up close if possible. This is if Bruce learned from his mistakes with Jason basing all his teachings around her personality taking all her strengths and weaknesses into account making Carrie to be a much more cautious vigilante. Dick wanted to see how she fights up close, if she’s capable of handling herself in all aspects. Dick attacked first using several jabs, upper cuts, kicks, and leg sweeps. Carrie was very fast able to keep up dodging and blocking whatever attacks were thrown at her, but she could tell Dick was holding back. This gave her an opening to use her last smoke pellet as she went in for a punch knowing he’d dodge it, crushing the smoke pellet in her hand creating a smokescreen blocking his vision as she quickly grabbed her taser from her utility belt. Thanks to her green lensed glasses being modified to have x-ray and infrared vision installed making him an easy target to get him in the neck before he had a chance to dodge out of the way. The electricity surged through Dick’s body making his limbs go numb for a moment long enough for Carrie to land a powerful kick to his gut knocking him to the ground. The shock absorbers in Dick’s armor absorbed most of the kinetic force from Carrie’s kick, but he was very impressed she hit him hard enough to knock him off his feet. He knew now how skilled and tactical she was trained to be in a fight thanks to Bruce. There was no reason to hold back anymore; she’s too good for that as he reached for the escrima sticks attached to his back. The escrima sticks lit up as the electricity flowed through them, while he once again got back into his fighting stance as he smiled at her. Carrie knew he was getting serious and she was almost all out of tricks. There was one more plan up her sleeve, but knew she’ll have to take a bit of punishment for it to work. She quickly pulled out her slingshot firing several standard pellets, but Dick’s armor was strong so they had little to no effect. The only time he’d block the incoming projectiles with his escrima sticks is when they came close to his face. Carrie put away the slingshot moving as fast as she could to strike at Dick catching him by surprise since she played this fight so safe up to this point. Every attack was countered or blocked as Carrie got hit multiple times in the gut and in the face making her nose bleed as Dick was the more experienced and superior fighter. Dick grabbed her by the shirt lifting her close to his face as he spoke.

“You’re good kid. You’re really good. But you know you have no business involving yourself with Bruce and his mission. You should go back to a normal life. It’ll save you endless pain and you’ll be better.....”, Dick paused, as it was too late for him to react or escape the inevitable.

Carrie showed off her bloody smile with a knockout pellet between her teeth. She bit down discharging the pellet making knockout gas flow in both her face and Dick’s. Carrie fell to the ground out cold. Dick struggled to stay on his feet when his vision blurred out before going black. He managed to take a few steps before collapsing to the ground unconscious.

Chapter 13: Game Plan

Dick Grayson was jolted awake by smelling salts provided by Alfred. His vision returned as he slowly got up from the couch feeling like he was pummeled by a truck. He rubbed his eyes as Alfred handed him a bottle of water.

“Thank you Alfred”, he said, as he opened the bottle to take a big gulp.

“Think nothing of it Master Dick. I hope you got what you wanted after confronting Ms. Kelley the way you did”, said Alfred, in a subtly disappointed tone.

“I’m sorry Alfie. I hope I didn’t hurt her too bad. I’ll also clean up the mess”, said Dick in an embarrassed tone.

“You say that as though there was a choice in that matter. Master Bruce explicitly told me not to touch a thing from your little skirmish. There’s a broom and pan outside the door of the den when you’re ready”, said Alfred, before he started to make his way out the door.

“Is she awake yet by chance? I’d like to apologize”, asked Dick, in a shameful tone.

“Due to receiving a larger dose of the knockout gas Ms. Kelley is still resting. And before you ask, Master Bruce is also not here. He had a meeting to attend to discuss plans on how to deal with their current adversary”, said Alfred, as he exited the den.

Dick took a moment to get his thoughts together now that anger no longer guided his hand. He stared at the den carpet before burying his face in his hands as he still felt light headed from the gas. Dick could hear a familiar sound enter the den as a voice was heard.

“You had to go and start trouble here didn’t you? You couldn’t have just talked about your frustrations instead of creating a mess you knew Alfred was going to make you clean”, asked Barbara, shaking her head in disapproval.

“I know, I know Barb. I guess I just....had to see for myself. See if she’s capable”, said Dick, ashamed.

"I know you don't want what happened to Jason to happen to anyone else. But remember Dick. Jason was a great capable hero, but he always wanted to be independent before he was ready. His mistake cost him his life and cost all of us a good friend. Bruce misses him as much as we do and I listened through your earphones. He didn't replace Jason. Carrie is his new soldier who put her life on the line before being officially made Robin. I believe like he does that she'd be saving lives regardless of being Robin or not. And he saw that in her the same way he did Jason. He seems to be doing everything possible to make sure she is ready. Now that you two have had your scuffle you can learn about her and become her ally. Maybe even her friend", said Barbara, in a calm compassionate tone as she saw Dick take a long deep breath.

"Okay.....I agree. I need to apologize to her. I didn't even say anything. I didn't have too. She took one look at me and knew my intentions", he said, in a tone of clarity.

"Well we were all trained by the best and she is no different. Now that you're no longer angry, go make it right when she's up", Barbara said, giving Dick a sweet smile before kissing him on the cheek.

"I honestly feel bad. She was supposed to be at the meeting tonight with Bruce and she missed it because of me", Dick said, in an embarrassed shameful tone.

"It'll be okay. Knowing Bruce he'll probably record the whole thing on some device he has with him so she'll be up to speed. And the rest of us for that matter. If Basil Karlo can beat you and have enough confidence to challenge literally everyone at once. We're going to have to do our best and watch out for one another. We have friends and allies, but so does he", said Barbara concerned.

"Let's just hope whatever plans they make will be enough. Either way we will be there to help them with whatever they need", Dick said, ready for a fight.

.....At the Top of the GCPD

Amanda Waller and Commissioner Gordon were waiting by the large metal Bat-signal glowing brightly in the night sky. A voice could be heard making their way to where Amanda and Gordon were, as a woman in her forties, with dark hair, in a business suit talking on her cell phone entered through the building door towards the two authoritative figures.

"Look, I understand and it'll be handled. I'm here now, need to go talk later goodbye", said the woman hanging up the phone looking back and forth at Gordon and Amanda. "What's going on? Where is he? The signal is in the sky shouldn't this have started already", asked the woman speaking quickly.

"Mayor Reyes, when the signal shines one of two things happens. He shows up to hear what we have to say. Or he's already on top of it. One thing to remember Madam Mayor, he isn't on

your time. You're on his", said Gordon, as he suddenly started looking up above Mayor Reyes' head.

She turned to look up where Gordon was looking to see a large bat-shaped silhouette perched above the very top of the GCPD. Batman opened up his cape like a set of wings as he jumped gliding down to them landing perfectly in front of the bat signal. Gordon grabbed the nearby lever and shut down the bat signal as Amanda Waller spoke.

"Alright, we're all here. Let's discuss what's gonna happen come friday. Batman, you and Robin will fulfill the request Clayface presented you, while he does that Commissioner Gordon you and your people will vacate all nearby apartment buildings close to the pier to avoid unnecessary casualties. You'll also be responsible for providing blockades so no citizens or press get anywhere near the fighting. As for the news outlets' helicopters there's not much we can do since our priority is taking Clayface down if they wanna risk their people getting footage that's their problem. I'll have some people ready to shut down their broadcast signals if things get out of hand. Now, I have plans Alpha, Bravo, and Charlie in place going off of what we do and don't know about Clayface and how to capture him. It's why you're here Mayor Reyes, so you're aware of what will happen when one plan fails. To start plan Alpha, Batman will need to bring Clayface out in the open where one of our choppers will be flying by. The chopper will have a sniper on board to head shot the son of a bitch since, as of now we've only seen Clayface take shots to the body but maybe taking out his brain is the solution", explained Waller.

"Okay, it's unlikely it'll work, but you take the shot he goes down, great then what happens", asked Gordon curious.

"The government see's Basil Karlo as a possible asset. For what purposes are classified", said Waller, in a cold emotionless tone.

"And what if that doesn't work", asked Mayor Reyes, worriedly.

"It won't work", said Batman, in his dark gruff tone.

"And how do you know", asked Waller, in a calm curious tone.

"The night Carrie Kelley was attacked during the suburb massacre. One of her friends shot Clayface point blank in the back of the head. She said it wasn't long before he was back on his feet", said Batman.

"Good to know. Then it's a good thing we have electrical rounds. Maybe the shot will stun him long enough to capture and we will move onto plan Bravo. Thanks to the hospital footage and observing Batman's fight we noticed electricity has proved to affect Clayface. So we built a portable containment unit that has a generator system designed to keep him detained until we can move him to a facility where he can be properly contained and face punishment for all his crimes", said Waller, still in her cold calculated tone.

"Where you can also conduct experiments on him", said Batman, in his dark gruff tone.

"Like I said. He's an asset. An invaluable one", said Waller.

"You think you have him in the palm of your hand already when we haven't even seen the full extent of what this freak can do. Did you not listen to the video he sent us? He knew you'd think this way. When he clearly stated you don't have any control in this situation. He knows something none of us do", said Gordon, as his voice started to raise in frustration.

"Calm down Commissioner. I assure you this whole thing is well in hand. Hence why we have plan Charlie, which is the very reason Mayor Reyes is here. Madam Mayor, I know you have read the paperwork to sign off on so we can go ahead with the plan, if all else fails", asked Waller, in a calm tone.

"I did and I have to say I'm not happy with it. I can't sign off on destroying one of Gotham's biggest money making attractions. Let alone risking destroying countless homes and businesses. I'm sorry Ms. Waller. I have to decline", said Mayor Reyes, in a timid tone.

"Every operation needs a last resort Madam Mayor", said Waller, calmly.

"Are you completely out of your mind! I get we need to stop this thing but blow up an entire area? Gotham has too many scars from the war with the Joker two years ago. Do we really need more to take this one guy down? Is that truly necessary", asked Gordon, dumbfounded.

"She may be right Jim", said Batman, which caught everyone off guard. Even making Waller raise an eyebrow. "I'm the only one here who has fought him multiple times now. There was nothing I could do to stop nor detain him. And like Jim said we don't have a clue to the full extent of his abilities and what his endgame is. I don't think explosives will work, but maybe at the very least it'll hurt him enough to stop him. Mayor, another Pier can always be built. But there's no telling what Clayface really has in store for Gotham and to prevent any more lives being taken we should consider all measures", explained Batman, as the air felt heavy as though nobody could breathe. Mayor Reyes lost herself in thought for a few moments.

"Okay. To prevent any more massacres like the one at the monorail. I'll sign off on Ms. Waller's plan. I hope you're right about this Batman. I want this monster captured or destroyed. Just get it out of my city", Mayor Reyes said, in a stressed tone.

"Then I'll get my people on it. Commissioner, have the fire department closeby in case we need them ", said Waller.

"Fine, I'll take care of what's on my end. I just hope this works for everyone's sake", said Gordon frustrated.

“Very good. Until then I’ll see most of you Friday at the Gotham Pier. I have plans to put into action”, said Waller, as she left with the Mayor trailing after her.

“You think this is crazy right?”, Gordon asked Batman, still frustrated.

“Jim, if I knew any other way to stop him I would have disagreed with Waller. In truth, I don’t know if any of her plans will work. I just know Friday is our best chance to stop him. If we fail, there’s no telling the consequences of what can transpire”, said Batman.

“I know. There are times I wish this job of ours was easier. But if it was. We wouldn’t be the people we are”, said Gordon as he went to the edge and leaned against the metal railing looking upon the city.

“We struggle in this fight together Jim”, said Batman, standing behind Gordon.

“Maybe one day we won’t have too. Then again that may just be a pipe dream for us”, Gordon said as turned around to see Batman was gone.

Back at Wayne Manor Dick finished cleaning up the mess from the fight as Barbara was finishing setting up her equipment down in the bat cave. Carrie awoke in her bed, her face and body were sore and bruised from her fight with Dick. She got out of bed still wearing her clothes from the fight as she grabbed her slingshot and bag of pellets that were placed on her dresser. When she exited the room and made her way down to the first floor Carrie’s adrenaline started to kick-in when she saw Dick placing the broom and dustpan by the kitchen door. She immediately loaded her slingshot and took aim as he noticed her raising his hands high to surrender and started to quickly speak.

“Wait wait wait! Stop! I surrender! Please don’t shoot”, he shouted.

“You know I expect weirdos and psychopaths to have the urge to attack me at first glance, but not Bruce’s former sidekick”, said Carrie angrily, still holding back the sling ready to fire.

“Look I know that was beyond messed up! I’m sorry! I’m truly sorry! I was an asshole and attacked you out of spite and anger and I shouldn’t have done that to you. I was angry with Bruce and bitter at the thought he was replacing Jason. I know now that was never the case and I was an idiot for thinking that in the first place. Please, can we start over”, asked Dick sticking his hand out for a shake.

Carrie didn’t hesitate and fired the pellet hitting Dick in the knuckle making him yelp in pain as he coddled his hand as the sharp pain burned, while Carrie finished making her way down the stairs and walking past him to go down to the cave.

“After what you did, a pretty little apology ain’t gonna cut it buddy”, she said entering the den to the batcave.

Dick followed after her, still coddling his hand and trying to shake out the pain as they made their way into the bat cave with Batman arriving in the batmobile from his meeting. Carrie, Barbara, and Dick all gathered by the bat computer as Batman exited the batmobile to approach them.

“Glad to see you all here. I have the meeting all recorded so you’re all up to date on what we’re doing to take on Clayface. I also have Lucius in the process of making us some electrical based weapons to combat our enemy if things go array. They’ll be here by tomorrow so you have time to get familiar with them. Oracle you’ll be provided a drone so, you’ll be our eye in the sky, while Nightwing will be on standby ready to jump in as back up. Myself and Robin will face Basil Karlo. For now, take this time to figure out our entrance and exit strategies for the fight ahead by learning the layout of the Gotham Pier. Let’s do our best to prepare and get out of this alive. And if you need time to think, breathe, and enjoy yourself by taking a little time for yourself. Do it”, said Batman, as he removed a small chip from his gauntlet and inserted it into the batcomputer so his team could observe the meeting.

Over the next day and a half Bruce and the bat family trained and prepared best they could for all the possible outcomes of how the battle could go whether it’s in their favor or not. Like a well working think tank they worked out everything they could, but the biggest unknown factor was Basil Karlo and his ability. There really wasn’t any way to properly counter what he can become and to what degree his transformations work. Lucius arrived at the manor with the weapons Bruce requested.

“Hey Bruce, I come bearing gifts. Mind helping me out”, Lucius said, as he opened the trunk of his vehicle and pulled out a metal briefcase.

“Of course, Lucius. I can’t thank you enough for doing this on short notice”, said Bruce, in a thankful tone as he walked down the steps to grab a metal briefcase from Lucius’ trunk.

“You always knew I liked a challenge Bruce. This was much better than when you had me crack that code to find that hacker. Speaking of which, what happened with that”, he asked, curiously.

“We found that your coordinates were correct. Unfortunately, Clayface got to us before we could turn her in”, said Bruce, in a disappointed tone as he and Lucius brought the weapons down into the batcave.

“Level with me Bruce. You really think these will have any effect on Clayface? I know you said the electrical discharge in your gauntlets had an effect on him. But it doesn’t sound like a guarantee it’ll be enough to take him down”, said Lucius, in a very concerned tone.

"Lucius, there is no guarantee. The fight ahead is going to be a "learn as we go" kind of fight. And our enemy holds all the cards and puts Gotham at his mercy", said Bruce, in a concerned tone.

"I see. Jesus Bruce. I hope these tools will be enough to help keep you and Carrie safe. Just know you can't use any of these on regular people. There's enough discharge in just one of these batarangs that could cook the inside of a person well done. If you need anything else you have all of Wayne Enterprises at your beckon call to help against this threat", said Lucius, as he stuck his hand out.

"You've always been a good friend, Lucius. Thank you", said Bruce, accepting Lucius' hand shaking it.

Chapter 14: Battle of the Gotham Pier

It was 3:00 a.m. Friday morning in another part of Gotham at the Iceberg Lounge. A fancy restaurant and club with a massive glacier in the middle of the dining room lit up with blue and white lights with black umbrella chandeliers hung around the dining area. Penguin was rallying dozens of armed men getting them all ready for the fight to come in the evening, so he can exact his revenge on the one who robbed him and killed his men.

"Alright, everyone listen up. We're gonna storm the Gotham Pier right as Batman shows up. We have enough firepower to blow him and that Clayface bastard to pieces. If they think I'm gonna lay down and accept being robbed and disrespected. Those shits have a reckoning coming", shouted Oswald Cobblepot, as his men cheered.

Suddenly the Iceberg Lounge's two front doors opened and everyone, Penguin included, fell silent as Basil Karlo himself walked through the door. Looking upon all the armed men with Penguin in his black suit wielding an umbrella standing on a table all stood frozen staring at him. Basil then walked over to the podium seeing a menu and grabbing it before making his way over to a nearby table.

"Don't mind me. Continue with whatever you are doing. I'm just looking to dine here since I never had the cuisine before", he said, before taking a seat and burying his face in a menu.

Penguin with a look of absolute pure anger and disgust aimed his umbrella at Basil and hit a mechanism making a trigger pop out of the handle of the umbrella. Penguin squeezed the trigger firing with a loud bang being heard as a large hole suddenly appeared through the menu Clayface was holding. Basil was still sitting in his chair as though completely unaffected.

"You know you're going to lose a star for rudeness", Basil said, annoyed as he lowered the menu. "How's a man supposed to order if he can't read the menu. That is if I was still a man. Not exactly anything at all anymore", he asked sarcastically.

"You should've never messed with me boy. I am the crime in this city. I am the boss. There's a reason I'm still 'ere and all the others are dead or locked up. And you, you're absolutely nothing. Just another punching bag for the bat. And when he's done with ya. I'll still be 'ere business as usual", said Penguin, as his men assisted him off the table as he made his way over to Clayface aiming the umbrella at him. Clayface simply smiled at Penguin completely untouched by his words.

"You talk a big game, bird. But I guess it's because you haven't realized what has happened. That's okay. It's why I'm here to show you so there's no mistake", Clayface said, as he stood up from his seat grabbing Penguin by his jacket collar being lifted high in the air by Clayface's twisted reddish brown morphing extending fleshy arm as Penguin and his men were horrified by the minor transformation. "You've been on top for too long and I think it has been difficult for you to process reality. You're no longer the biggest monster in this city Oswald. I'm here out in the open calling out everyone to challenge me as you hide behind your paper tiger of an organization. So, to make sure you don't screw up my big night tomorrow ", Clayface continued, as his other arm morphed into dozens of reddish brown tendrils.

Penguin gazed in horror as Clayface's tendrils extended quickly like sharp spears as they penetrated through one henchmen after another. The screams and cries of death as the men were stabbed and torn apart by the tendrils with some of the men shooting back to no avail. Any who didn't have a tendril piercing through his chest was pulled apart as blood painted the whole dining room. It was a sight that stuck in Penguin's mind as no words could leave his mouth. His beautiful Iceberg Lounge, once radiant and prestigious, now looked like a slaughterhouse. Clayface retracted his tendrils reforming his arm and putting his blood smeared hand in his pocket pulling out a phone and dialing a number. He put the phone to his ear and spoke.

"You can come on in, the men are dealt with. Yeah. Yeah, I think he knows his place now", Clayface said, looking directly into Penguin's eyes with a cold empty gaze before hanging up the phone. "Penguin, I'm going to lower you down now and you're going to drop the umbrella. Make any sudden moves at all and you'll be joining your men. Understood", asked Clayface, in a casual tone with Penguin simply nodding his head in agreement like he was in shock.

Clayface lowered Penguin in a nearby chair with the only movement being him dropping his umbrella as instructed, while Clayface's massive twisted disgusting extended arm retracted, morphing back to normal. Within moments the Iceberg Lounge's front doors opened as Plastique and her mercenaries entered carrying briefcases all containing C4. They got further into the dining room when the sight of all the bodies made some of the men freeze up due to the graphic visceral site before them, before they moved cautiously about avoiding stepping on any part of the corpses to set up the C4 on their designated pillars. Plastique looked over to Clayface and walked towards him speaking.

"I see you let loose in here", she said, looking over at all the dead henchmen. "Hopefully tomorrow's operation goes as smoothly as this did. You couldn't have created less of a horror

show could you? I think sometimes you really do revel in being a monster. I mean look what you did to Penguin. He looks like he gazed into the pit of hell and something smiled back ", she continued, as a cruel smirk came over her face.

"What you see is a man who swallowed his pride and accepted his place on the food chain", said Clayface, in a casual tone.

"Well, it's only about to get worse for the poor guy", Plastique said, as Penguin noticed the men attaching their explosives.

"Wait, you can't do this. I'll give you anything please. This isn't just my place of business, this is my home. My legacy", begged Penguin, as panic came over his face. Clayface walked over to lower himself so he was eye to eye with Penguin.

"Oswald, there is absolutely nothing you have that I need nor anything that I simply could take away from you. I took your money and I have my own manpower. And you know as well as I that if this city and my enemies are going to take me seriously I need my threat to be credible. So, I figured since you were an easy target, why not make you an example instead of some actual innocent proprietor of business", Clayface said, in a calm, pleasant tone.

"You evil bastard, I hope when Batman gets you he'll leave you broken and begging to be left in the asylum to rot. You think you're this titan coming 'ere to make Gotham your playground. Well I can promise you this freak! This city takes monsters like you, lifts you up before it smashes you from the skyline back down to the pavement bleeding in the gutter as people step over you already forgetting you were ever anything at all", Penguin shouted, in furious anger as some of Clayface's men came over to cuff Penguin as smile came over Clayface.

"My friend, I have already been broken and beaten beyond measure. The world kept spinning as I suffered without a moment of pause. This time the minds of millions will be frozen in horror when they see what I have in store for them. No one will ever forget me when I make history happen in front of their very eyes. Tomorrow is merely a debut for everything that's about to happen. Gentlemen take Mr.Cobblepot away, but make sure he has a clear view when this place goes up", Clayface said, in his calm pleasant tone.

The mercenaries were on each arm of the Penguin as he's dragged out of the Iceberg Lounge kicking, struggling, and cursing. Clayface and Plastique with the rest of the mercs followed with Plastique speaking.

"We have everything ready to go for tomorrow. The men know their positions and everything is set including several buildings ready to detonate when you give the word", said Plastique.

"Wonderful, then let's make it all a good show for the world to see", said Clayface smiling pleasantly as he and Plastique entered their vehicle and started the engine to drive away as Plastique pulled out a detonator.

“Would you like to do the honors”, she asked.

“No, the honor goes to you my friend”, Clayface said, smiling as he continued to drive the vehicle.

Plastique hit the detonator setting off all the bombs in the Iceberg Lounge blowing out the windows as the building collapsed on itself floor by floor falling on top of itself. Where a once grand and magnificent club stood reduced to rubble. Penguin in the back of a van was forced to watch every moment of his legacy destroyed. Pure sorrow filled his eyes with tears as anger boiled in his body as a flurry of emotions bubbled up inside him. He was no longer a boss who held all the power over his enemies. A powerhouse crime boss who once assisted in bringing down the biggest mobs families in Gotham. So many times it was him who crushed any opposing forces and punished any one who backed out of a deal or couldn't pay back their loan to him. The explosion made the reality finally sink in as he was now just another victim of the long gruesome history of Gotham's criminal underworld.

Bruce Wayne was awoken by the bat phone ringing at 5:00 am. He picked up to hear Commissioner Gordon who also sounded like he just woke up.

“Batman, I don't know if you just heard. But the Iceberg Lounge was destroyed. Clayface made good on his threat. We now know he's not bluffing about the bombs around the city. Several bodies were found, but no sign of Penguin. We'll update you if anything changes”, said Gordon, in a tired, raspy tone.

“Thank you Jim”, said Bruce, hanging up the phone.

Bruce laid in bed and before he knew it two hours went by as he lost himself in thought before getting out of bed and putting on his morning robe before heading downstairs. When he exited his room he could smell eggs and bacon being cooked knowing Alfred was making breakfast. He made his way to the kitchen taking in every moment of peace he could knowing what lies ahead. He sat at the table, while Alfred was finishing up cooking before bringing over Bruce a cup of coffee and a plate of scrambled eggs, bacon, and a slice of buttered toast. Bruce pulled out his phone looking through all the news outlets, all of whom were discussing Basil Karlo. From his crimes as Clayface to his start and exit from television as they have experts coming in discussing the psychology of an actor turned monster and terrorist in Gotham. The news also discussed the bombing of the Iceberg Lounge and how the number of bodies found in the rubble reached double digits with no sign of Oswald Cobblepot. Bruce took some bites out of his food before looking over to Alfred to speak.

“Is Carrie and the others still sleeping”, he asked curiously.

“Master Richard and Ms. Gordon are still in their room. Ms. Kelley however already had her breakfast though she didn’t seem in the mood for eating. Currently she resides in the cave more likely preparing for this evening”, said Alfred, as his tone changed from proper to worried.

“I see. Alfred, I’m not sure what’s going to happen, but I can promise I’ll do everything in my ability to keep Carrie and Dick safe tonight”, said Bruce, trying to sound reassuring.

“Bruce it’s not just Ms. Kelley or Master Richard’s safety I’m concerned for. It’s all of you. We haven’t seen anyone or anything like this in a long time and the last time you did, I almost lost my family. I know this hurts and it hurts me to say it, but you made that same promise about Jason. I don’t want to bury any more loved ones Bruce. But as much as it pains me I understand if either of you back out countless lives are at stake. I hate feeling so helpless knowing there’s nothing I can do to stop any of the terrible things that are coming. I know you aren’t a child anymore Bruce, but sometimes it’s hard for a guardian or parent to see someone they love in trouble and being completely incapable to protect them”, said Alfred, expressing everything he’s been wanting to say since this turmoil with Clayface began. “And it’s not just you, I feel that way for Ms. Kelley, Master Richard, and Ms. Gordon. I just want you all to be safe and get through this ordeal without any more sacrifices”, he continued as Bruce was at a loss for words processing everything he was being told by his best friend and father figure.

“I’m sorry Alfred. I’m sorry. I’ll keep them safe. No sacrifices this time”, said Bruce, as a look of pure focus and determination came over his face not knowing Dick was eavesdropping outside the kitchen door.

Dick made his way down to the cave, which was dark with hardly any lights on for the exception of the screen lighting from the batcomputer. He noticed Carrie was looking through files and watching videos from the Stagg files. Dick made his way over as the voice of Simon Stagg could be heard, but the volume was too low to make out the words. Carrie was too focused on the footage to notice Dick coming towards her as she listened closely to the discussion Stagg was having with Basil Karlo. Dick also listened without making a sound.

“Mr. Karlo I’m sorry you’ve been experiencing some inconveniences...”, Stagg said, before being cut off.

“Inconveniences!! You call chemical changes to my brain and small deformities to my face INCONVENIENCES! Simon I’m suffering from cases of memory loss and these boils and blisters to my face aren’t going away. Your stupid products have ruined me, you UNBELIEVABLE ASSHOLE”, screamed Basil, in a pure rage filled tone.

“CALM THE HELL DOWN! You signed the contract and were paid very well to promote our products! It was clear in writing the risks were possible”, yelled Stagg, in an insulted tone.

“Risks that my lawyer conveniently neglected to brief me! You paid him off! Didn’t you?! It’s not a coincidence my lawyer drops me as a client not long after this ball and chain of a contract was finalized”, yelled Basil, in a hate filled tone.

“If you wanna back out of our contract I’ll see to it you’ll be sued into poverty! You have no say anymore Basil! You can scream and threaten all you want, but at the end of the day you have two choices! Finish out the rest of the year and continue to test and promote what we sell! Or end up on the street with your pretty little girlfriend! You have till tomorrow to figure your shit out! Now get the fuck out of my office before I call security”, yelled Simon as the video cut out.

“Doesn’t seem at all like the guy we’ve been fighting against does it”, Dick said, making Carrie jump almost out of her seat.

“Jeez, just when I thought you couldn’t be more of a prick and you sneak up on me”, Carrie said, in an annoyed tone.

“Look, I just wanted...”, Dick said, before immediately being cut off.

“Shut up, don’t even speak. You were planning to attack me the moment you set eyes on me. It doesn’t take a trained vigilante to figure out your intentions by the look in your eye. The fact is I earned my mantle and did not need your approval. Bruce has accepted me as Robin. Your little test was just an excuse to justify taking your frustrations out on someone you didn’t know. You believed I was out to replace someone you probably considered a brother. Regardless, whether or not you agree with Bruce taking me in isn’t for you to judge. This is what I want and no one makes my decisions for me. Not Bruce and especially not you. If you want to be truly sorry, watch my back and help me stay alive tonight. That’ll earn my trust”, said Carrie, in a harsh unforgiving tone.

Before Dick had a chance to speak, the lights in the cave flickered on as Carrie got up and left the cave passing by Bruce as he stood on the entrance balcony. He looked at Carrie passing by before looking at Dick who stood awkwardly in front of the bat computer before taking a seat.

“Bruce, I’m trying. I really am”, said Dick.

“You can’t blame her. Just do what she says. Believe or not that girl has been through as much pain and trauma as any young person should. You can relate to her in that regard. In a short time she lost her parents who neglected her. She lost the very people who took her in as family. Alfred and I are all she has now. She’s looked into the abyss as we have and hasn’t blinked. The mantle she inherited was more than just earned. Carrie is Robin. I know you made a mistake Dick. One you will never make again”, said Bruce, with a calm tone, but Dick noticed the flicker of rage that filled Bruce’s eyes.

Bruce turned his back on Dick to head back up to the manor, leaving Dick to ponder on what was said to him as he turned in his chair. He looked at the screen to see Basil Karlo's vengeful blistered and boiled face.

Commissioner Gordon is smoking his pipe, while driving to where the Iceberg Lounge once stood. He pulled up close to one of his fellow police cruisers and got out of the car to approach the crime scene. Detective Renee Montoya noticed Gordon and approached him with a look of dread on her face.

"Hey, Commissioner. There are at least more than two dozen bodies found so far. Some were in pieces as though torn apart", said Montoya, in a disturbed tone.

"Torn apart huh? Has Cobblepot been found yet", Gordon asked, curiously.

"Not yet sir. We're still digging through the rubble. Either Cobblepot just hasn't been dug up yet, wasn't here at all, or he was taken. But we did find a lot of weapons found close by the bodies so we can deduce they were gearing up for something big", explained Montoya.

"Well, considering Clayface admitted to robbing Penguin and killing his men on television, plus he stated where he plans to be and when. More likely Cobblepot was going to make a move, only Clayface must've been a step ahead of him", said Gordon, in a tired tone.

"You're looking tired sir", said Montoya, in a concerned tone.

"Well, between evacuating several blocks, setting up barricades and security checkpoints, dealing with Waller, and now getting confirmation that there are several buildings rigged to blow, but no explosives could be found anywhere. All in a span of a couple days. Yeah Montoya. I am tired", said Gordon, rubbing his eyes under his glasses frustrated.

"Is Sarah home yet?" Montoya asked, curiously.

"No, she's still caring for her mother in Metropolis. I told her to stay there where it's safe away from all the madness here. She had her reservations, but she eventually agreed. Barbara on the other hand is an entirely different matter", Gordon said, with a small chuckle. "Anyhow keep up the good work. And Detective Montoya. I don't want you or Bullock anywhere near the pier tonight. If things go south I need to rely on you two to maintain order. Understood", Gordon continued, in a serious tone.

"Copy that Commissioner. Just be careful. We need you and Batman both to make it through tonight. Don't take any unnecessary risks to your safety", said Montoya, worried knowing if she argued about Gordon staying away from the Pier he would just scowl her.

"If only that were in my nature detective", Gordon said, taking another puff from his pipe.

Hours have gone by as the evening was fast approaching, Carrie was sitting out in the rose garden seeing the colors in the sky beginning to change as the sunset reflected in the clouds with red, orange, white, and pink. Barbara made her way to the garden and over to Carrie.

“Hey, we’re meeting in the cave to get ready. You doing alright”, Barbara asked, in a curious tone.

“If I’m being honest. I don’t know. Whenever I put on the cape it’s like a switch and my mind and body just do what they were trained to do. There’s no question and no worry. But right now it’s hard to move like if I take a step I’ll fall. Barbara, everything you put yourself through and everything you sacrificed. It was worth it wasn’t it”, asked Carrie, with a look of fear and worry.

“Carrie, it was worth every second. If I wasn’t wheelchair bound I’d be right there with you when you go to the Gotham Pier. I think of all the things I got to do and experience fighting alongside Bruce and Dick as Batgirl. Whenever I look in the mirror I smile proudly, because I did and still do actual good to help people in need. I won’t lie when I say I envy you in a way. Your adventure is only beginning and you will have so much to give as you come into your own as Robin. And one day Carrie, you’ll grow beyond that mantle and become something even more incredible. You’re too strong to let this monster beat you, just remember that”, said Barbara, as she gave a sweet smile to Carrie giving her the boost she needed to stand up from the bench.

“Thank you Barbara. Let’s head down to the cave. We have a bad guy to catch”, said Carrie, as a look of courage filled her eyes.

The pair entered the den and Carrie noticed Barbara rolling past the grandfather clock and towards the book shelf on the opposite side of the fireplace. She pulled out a book which opened the book shelf that led to a one person elevator, which made Carrie smile as she realized that’s how Barbara avoids using the stairs.

“So, that’s how you get down there”, she said, in a surprised tone.

“Gotta love the way Bruce prepares for everything. I’ll see you down there”, said Barbara as she got into the elevator and it lowered her down into the cave as Carrie headed down on foot.

When Carrie made it to the bottom of the steps Batman and Nightwing were already all suited up and ready to go waiting for her. Carrie went and grabbed her suit from the display case and got the suit on as well. Barbara made her way over to the batcomputer loading up everything she’ll need to assist the heroes. Batman waited by the batcomputer as Nightwing made his way over to his motorcycle. He got onto his vehicle and started up the engine as it roared making the sound echo throughout the cave before taking off exiting the cave. Robin was all geared up and ready for the battle ahead as she ran over to the batmobile. She then notices Batman waving her over to his direction as she approaches him confused.

“What’s going on? And why did Nightwing take off already”, Robin asked, in a confused tone.

“He’s going ahead to get to his position. We won’t be taking the batmobile tonight”, Batman said, as he pushed a button on his gauntlet and an engine roared.

Robin looked to see a whole other section of the cave light up as the engine of the bat jet roared. For a moment Robin forgot about her fear and anxiety, instead was filled with excitement as her eyes lit up knowing she was going to ride in the bat jet and hopefully one day get the chance to fly it.

“Let’s get going Robin”, said Batman, as he headed for the bat jet.

Batman and Robin made their way over to the bat jet and entered. Robin looked at all the lit up buttons and operation systems mesmerized by the advanced tech and equipment. Robin then heard a voice.

“Alright comms should already be synced up. Good luck everybody I’ll have the drone out there keeping watch on you guys. Be safe Oracle out”, said Barbara, as she works on the batcomputer as her alias Oracle.

The bat jet then started to hover before turning in midair towards its tunnel as it suddenly took off like a bullet out of a barrel . The g-force made Robin feel the pressure of the bat jet's speed on her face as it flew out of the cave system taking off into the night sky. Robin enjoyed these last few moments of peace looking out at the view passing by as the bat jet flew over the water towards Gotham. Her peace was soon filled with adrenaline and dread as the Gotham Pier soon came into view. Sometimes she forgets how gargantuan the pier is, as the attractions extend to a concrete foundation where the water based rides are located. To her surprise the Pier was lit up with bright beautiful lights glaring in the darkened sky. The bat jet got close enough and hovered above the Ferris Wheel. Batman and Robin used their capes to glide down to the top of the Ferris Wheel as the bat jet was left on autopilot flying off. Batman then used his capes again to glide down to the pier floor as Robin followed suit. The duo made their way to the Haunted House of Mirrors with Batman noticing countless Black SUVs and armored military grade vehicles with barricades completely blocking off the pier as a few hundred armed men dawned in black armor, and black helmets with the word Argus in white lettering across their chests. There was no sign of Waller who was most likely stationed behind the firing line of her Argus troops, but Batman did notice Gordon wearing his brown trench coat with a white shirt and tie standing alongside the Argus troops giving Batman a small salute acknowledging him. Batman and Robin walked past the lit up attractions and carnival games as several news helicopters were flying around the Gotham Pier getting footage of the duo. They finally saw it. The Haunted House House of Mirrors with a massive mural displaying a nightmare version of Alice in Wonderland combined various horrific images of monsters coming out of multiple mirrors to get Alice and the White Rabbit. The building was easily three stories tall and one of the biggest attractions of the park that wasn’t a ride. Batman and Robin stood in front of the entrance when the door opened and Robin’s heart was pumping out of her chest. Basil Karlo came out of the entrance with a big smile on his face. Robin’s dread turned into rage as she

bawled her hand into a fist as she wanted to pounce on Clayface and tear him apart for what he did as flashes of that night filled her mind as she could still hear Michelle's screams. She was about to move when she suddenly felt a hand grab her wrist and the rage subsided for a second. Batman held her wrist tightly keeping her from making a mistake as his eyes were locked on Clayface as he made his way down the attractions steps.

"Hello there! Welcome. Welcome. Welcome. Isn't this all incredible? I was expecting a turn out, but not something beyond my expectations. News helicopters in the sky, Waller's blockade of soldiers, the police barricading streets, police checkpoints, and most importantly the crown jewel of this whole affair. The legendary Batman and Robin are here to apprehend me. I need.... I need just a moment", said Clayface, in an excited tone taking in the scenery as proud as anyone could be. "It's perfect isn't it Batman? Where we are. I always loved the concept of a theme park as the setting of a battle between two foes. And here I am getting to live it. I haven't felt anything like this before. Ever since my life changed at least. Now let's begin. Robin I would like your comms please", Clayface continued, as he held his hand out looking at Robin with a sinister look in his eye.

"Why do you want her comms", asked Batman, still clutching on Robin's wrist so she doesn't move.

"Batman, if I don't have those comms in my hand in the next thirty seconds I will signal my people to bomb Gotham. Robin, give me your comms. Last chance", Clayface said, as his smile disappeared with only a cold gaze glaring at Robin.

Batman looked down at Robin as she looked up at him and he nodded with a dark angry look on his masked face. Robin felt Batman release her wrist as she reached in her mask removing the earphones before making her way to Clayface putting the comms in his hand. Clayface closed his hand crushing comms into pieces then dropping the crushed earphones to the ground.

"Robin, I trust you know where the Tunnel of Love resides? Nod yes or no", Clayface said, in a cold curious tone as Robin nodded yes. "Good you have two minutes to get there. Someone is waiting for you inside. Any second longer and the bombs go off. Get moving", he continued, in a cold threatening tone.

Robin took one last gaze at Batman before she took off running towards the Tunnel of Love. Clayface looked on as Robin ran off before glaring back at Batman with a cruel smile coming over his face.

"Alright Batman, let's not waste any time. Set a timer for sixty seconds, then come on in. One second more or less and you know the drill. See you inside", said Clayface, still retaining his cruel smile.

Batman stood by waiting for the time to go in keeping a calm composure waiting for the sixty seconds to go by as Oracle came over the intercom.

"Batman, I lost Robin, is she alright", she asked, worriedly.

"Oracle, Clayface took her comms and broke them. He separated us. Have Nightwing keep an eye on her. She's heading for the Tunnel of Love", said Batman, in his dark gruff tone.

"Roger, that Batman. Oracle out", said Oracle.

Batman's sixty seconds was about to be up as he started walking up the attraction's steps hearing the creepy noises and soundtrack playing from the speakers as he entered The Haunted House of Mirrors. The attraction was lit up with a variety of neon lights, with spooky laughter and screams heard throughout the house as Batman approached a hallway that had an optical illusion of a wall spiraling closer and further away. Suddenly the soundtrack was cut out and replaced with somber music as Batman could hear Basil Karlo speaking on the intercom as he continued searching for Basil through the neon maze of creepy monstrous animatronics popping out, robotic doors opening and closing, and hallways literally spinning in a clockwise rotation.

"You wanna know something Batman? I never felt any gratification when I murdered the people I did over the past year and a half. Well besides my lawyer since he betrayed me to Stagg, so I killed him as gruesomely as possible, but everyone else. I was just playing a role to help me properly get in the mind set to kill and not hesitate. I figured if I could look an undeserving individual in the eye when I killed them enough times, that when I finally gunned for Stagg nothing will prevent what he rightfully deserves. I don't want to have to kill you since I know how good you are for Gotham and its people, but I also know if I don't. You'll simply try to stop me when you should be helping me keep the gun steady when I pull the trigger on Stagg. So, here we are and I know you've been to my apartment. You've seen what I fear. To make things interesting you'll be up against a familiar face. Good luck Batman", said Clayface, as the intercom disconnected with the creepy soundtrack turning back on.

Batman moved through the spinning hallway leading to a door that displayed a creepy neon mutated Cheshire cat with a sign above the door that said "*Welcome to the Looking Glass Room*". Batman entered a large room with countless rotating mirrors that had projections of monstrous figures appear, disappear, and reappear. One specific character caught Batman's eye. One all too familiar to him. The Clayface killer who inspired Basil Karlo's murderous persona appeared for a brief moment as one of the mirrors lit up he appeared behind the projection. He wore his signature round hat which was dark purple, along with his suit and cape which all were the same dark purple color. His face appeared melted with his eyes sunk so deep in the eye sockets you couldn't see them. This was a cat and mouse game. Batman began to move carefully, being observant of the rotating mirrors awaiting for Clayface to make the first move. Unexpectedly the knife was thrust between two rotating mirrors from Batman's left as it

sliced the armor on his bicep not reaching the skin as Clayface pulled back before the mirror's rotation closed on his arm. Clayface dashed between the mirrors as Batman chased after him losing track of his enemy. Batman continued to walk through the rotating mirrors, until suddenly a blood curdling scream came over the soundtrack as Clayface's knife struck again this time he sliced the armor protecting Batman's jugular, but Batman proved to be quicker this time grabbing hold of Clayface's arm and throwing him over his shoulder smashing him through a couple mirror projectors. Clayface immediately got back to his feet due to him being immune to taking any form of damage by physical attacks. A blow for blow skirmish started between Batman and Clayface, as Batman used the blades on his gauntlets to deflect Clayface's knife. Batman used his extraordinary fighting prowess to block every attack that came his way as he countered with jabs and palm strikes but they had little effect. Clayface was able to grab Batman's arm, twisting him lifting off the ground and throwing him through more mirrors. Thanks to the shock absorbers in Batman's armor he took little damage, but before he could move out of the way Clayface was already on top of him putting his hand on Batman's chest easily digging his fingers into Batman's chest armor gripping him and lifting him up in the air as he started trying to slice and stab his way through Batman's defenses managing to cut through the armor slicing Batman's torso, legs, and arms. Batman quickly pulled out an electrical batarang and stabbed it into Clayface's arm. The discharge surged through his body making Clayface drop Batman giving the hero an opening to place several small explosive devices around the monster's body. Clayface removed the batarang and was about to charge in for an attack when the explosives went off around his body disorientating him just long for Batman to throw several batarangs into his body and before the discharge went off he fired his taser packing a powerful electrical punch. Clayface seizes and flails as he appears to be in agony making his form change into absurd abominations with his body twisting and mutating. When it stopped Clayface was back into his normal form wearing a gray hoodie and black pants. Smoke could be seen coming from his body as for the first time he was on his hands and knees with his body trembling. He looked up at Batman with a look of cold vengeful fury. He opened his mouth to speak.

"This is no longer fun for me. I guess it's time to break all my little toy soldiers now", he said, with a hate filled scowl.

Tendrils formed on his back whipping around smashing all the nearby mirrors. When he moved he was too quick for Batman to react, wrapping around him before lifting him up and slamming Batman through the attraction wall back outside. Batman twisted his body so he could use his cape to glide to ground, but the impact was too hard for him to control the landing, making him roll across the pier's hardwood floor. Batman got back to his feet slowly when he looked up at the second floor of The Haunted House of Mirrors to see Clayface leap down to the pier to face off with Batman out in the open. All of the Argus soldiers got their guns ready as they all took aim at Clayface as he stood looking at them unimpressed, turning away from Batman to look at them. Waller appeared on the frontlines to get a look at Clayface as she pulled out her radio making the order for plan Alpha to go into effect.

“Hey, Chopper one. This is Wall one you are a go”, she ordered, with a look of pure intrigue like a scientist observing the result of their experiment.

Clayface looked at her with all her men and couldn't help, but smile at the excitement he was feeling. Batman tried to get his attention as a black helicopter appeared coming from around a nearby building and was making their way circling the pier.

“Basil! Your fight is with me! Leave them out of it”, Batman shouted.

Clayface's smile widened as he turned to look at Batman.

“You don't realize Batman that tonight isn't just about killing you and Robin. It's about showing the world that not you nor the government can stop me. And Gotham as well as America are gonna see what I can do”, Clayface shouted, in excitement.

Before anyone realized what transpired. The black helicopter opened up the side door and the sniper on board took aim at Clayface's head. The sniper didn't hesitate firing his weapon as the caliber of the projectile mistakenly went clean through Clayface's head. He paused for a moment as everyone looked on in anticipation if shooting him in the head did anything. The wound closed up and Clayface formed his hand into a large ball with spikes like a morning star mace. He looked up at the black helicopter and he quickly threw a punch making his arm extend all the way up in the air smashing it into the helicopter making it spin out of the sky crashing into a part of the pier roller coaster killing everyone on board. He then looked over at Waller opening his arms as a challenge.

“Is that really the best you can do”, he shouted, in a disappointed tone.

Waller pulled out her radio to speak.

“Captain Trevor, you are a go to execute plan Bravo”, she said.

After she gave the order to her soldiers to open fire on Clayface giving Batman very little time to duck out of the way. A hailing of bullets flew across the front of the pier as Clayface stood proudly as he was riddled with bullets, but the bullets simply flew through him as he continued to stand unaffected. Waller called on her soldiers to stop shooting and switch their weapons to a different mode. All the soldiers complied, switching out their ammo as Clayface looked on curiously as to what Waller could have up her sleeve. Once the soldiers were ready Clayface unleashed numerous reddish brown tendrils from his back, as they took aim at him. Right before Waller gave the order to fire Clayface's tendrils meshed together forming a hardened barrier right in front of him as the soldiers began to open fire. The barrier protected Clayface from the projectiles, with one of them managing to punch landing at his feet. He was curious bending down with the sound of gunfire ringing in his ear. He tried to pick up the bizarre looking bullet with his fingers and the moment he touched a small surge of electricity caught him by surprise making his fingers twitch. He then realized why his barrier was holding up so well as

these plastic projectiles were designed to take him down since bullets have no effect as the look of being impressed came over his face.

“That clever diabolical bitch”, he said, to himself as though Waller out did herself.

The soldiers continued firing upon Clayface’s barrier as Batman pulled out an electrical batarang knowing he had to help Waller keep Clayface busy until plan Bravo could be executed. Batman came out from cover and started tossing batarangs as Clayface transformed his arms from elbow down to his hand into reddish brown blades cutting down and blocking any batarangs that came his way. Batman and Waller’s methods were working keeping Clayface in one spot. Batman heard the chopper flying close to the pier that had the containment unit, while still assisting in keeping Clayface pinned, but knew the moment that container would be over Clayface’s head he wouldn’t be dumb to stand still to be captured. The helicopter got closer and Batman pulled out two spherical devices from his utility belt. The soldiers continued to open fire, but the ammo wasn’t guaranteed to slow Clayface down enough for the container to catch him. The helicopter was about to be overhead of Clayface and he noticed the black container. He looked as though he was going to make a run for it when Batman quickly tossed the two devices at Clayface’s feet exploding with a translucent substance completely coating over his shins down to his feet. The container was now above Clayface as Waller yelled into her radio.

“DROP THE PAYLOAD NOW”, she shouted.

Clayface tried to run but the translucent substance stuck to him was like glue and he couldn’t move his feet as he glared at Batman for the first time with a look of shock and concern. The helicopter dropped the container on top of him, while he used his arm blade to amputate both his legs from his shins that were trapped. He started to crawl away with new shins and feet forming from the stumps, but he wasn’t quick enough. The container landed on top of Clayface, capturing him. The container generator kicked on creating an electrical field around the container. A look of relief came over Amanda Waller’s face as her soldiers started to cheer a little at the success of their mission. They came from behind the barricade and started surrounding the container with Batman moving towards the container putting his hand on his gauntlet accessing his comms and getting in touch with Oracle.

“Oracle, come in what’s the status of Nightwing and Robin”, he asked.

“Batman, there’s a huge problem patching you through to Nightwing now”, Oracle said, in a worried tone.

“Batman! You need to run! RIGHT NOW! RUN!”, shouted Nightwing, in a horrified tone.

“Nightwing! What happened? Is Robin alright”, Batman asked, in a concerned tone.

“Batman, it’s going to kill everyone! Just runaway”, Nightwing shouted.

Suddenly, the vibe completely shifted from relief and excitement to pure dread and hopelessness. A loud crashing could be heard making all the soldiers turn around as the sound came from the direction the Tunnel of Love was. Whatever it was was heading their way too quickly for anyone to react. The massive monstrosity tore its way through the attractions as everyone looked on in horror knowing they didn't stand a chance. Waller for the first time was frozen in fear only able to utter a few words.

"Oh my god", she said, in wide eyed terror.

Batman made his way around the container to see it and knew the odds weren't good, but he pulled out two electrified batarangs to ready himself for the fight ahead. He came too far to stop and had never given up before and won't stop now. Gordon also simply grabbed one of the rifles with electrified ammo armed, readying himself for the fight ahead.

.....Few Moments Before Batman Entered The Haunted House of Mirrors

Robin made her way to the Tunnel of Love with a few seconds to spare as she breathed heavily since she practically sprinted from one part of the park to the other. She walked past the metal railing as used the walkway that was on both sides of the boat canal. The boats were swan and heart shaped with a giant heart as the entrance into the tunnel. A song was playing over the rides speakers called Antonio by the band Annie. It was a dark but a sweet melancholy sound almost haunting with the singer's voice echoing throughout the tunnel. The tunnel was painted red, white, and pink with several romantic displays that had wax figures conducting romantic scenes showing the stages of a successful relationship from a first date, to a wedding, till the couple is elderly, and finally till death. With all the displays separated by walls that had a door that gave entry to each display. The lighting was dim with lights going off and on for the displays. Robin tread lightly as the music rang in her ears, keeping a watchful eye in case someone was disguised as one of the wax figures as she had her hand on one of her electrical batarangs. She walked past the first date and wedding displays making her into the family life display opening the door and suddenly she froze as her blood ran cold. A familiar face was sitting on the couch with both the male and female wax figures having their heads bludgeoned to pieces. Crystal, wearing a black long sleeved shirt and black pants with black gloves turned her head to look at Robin and smiled.

"Hello there, Carrie", she said, softly.

Robin was stunned and couldn't make herself move from where she was standing as her hand trembled with every moment of that night flashing through her mind as Michelle's screams kept ringing in her ears with tears forming under her mask. This monster took the form that killed her family and worst of all it said her actual name. Robin could only utter two words.

"Who's Carrie", she asked, in a tone of complete shock as her mind started racing. How does she know my identity? When did she figure it out? How did she figure it out? What should I do? What else does she know? Does she know who Batman is? Questions hitting her mind

from all sides deterred her focus as sweat began to drip down, failing to get her anxiety under control.

“Let’s not play dumb. I’ve been studying the human form in its entirety for a long time. After we’ve been so close and personal you really honestly believe that a different outfit would fool me? I mean there aren’t exactly too many girls with your physique or that jaw line with those lips who play with a slingshot as their weapon. Come on now. I knew it was you the moment I saw you in that burning apartment. I know you remember. I disguised myself as the officers who shot Netbug. We’ve had enough confrontations and I’ve touched you enough and looked at you enough to know you. Ever since we fought at your friend’s house. Sorry to say, but one doesn’t forget when a fourteen year old girl kicks ass like that. Every time we encountered each other you always got away from me. I did for a moment regret letting you live when I threw you out that window. But since we keep coming back to each other this just proves I was meant to kill you. There is no escaping me tonight and I know Michelle would like a reunion with you”, giggled Crystal, as she pulled out her claw hammer. “Now, I do believe you and I have some unfinished....”, before Crystal could finish her sentence.

Robin within less than a couple seconds whipped out the batarang hitting the charge mechanism causing the electricity to flow through the batarang as she threw it hitting Crystal directly in the forehead penetrating her skull. The electricity discharged causing it to surge throughout Crystal’s whole body making her shake erratically as she screamed in pain. She suddenly fell silent before falling flat on her back no longer moving. Robin stood frozen in the position she threw the batarang waiting for Crystal to move, but didn’t. Her hand trembled before her whole body shook. Her knees gave out and tears streamed down her face before she looked up at the ceiling.

“I got her. I got her Michelle”, she said, as she started getting her composure taking deep breaths.

Robin was able to regain her bearings pulling out a pair of electrified handcuffs after she got back to her feet, but before she could finally feel any ounce of relief. She looked upon Crystal’s body, noticing the batarang lifting itself slowly out of the wound before completely removing itself from Crystal’s skull. Crystal began to speak.

“You feel better Carrie. I hope that was gratifying for you. I felt like if that was a scene in a movie, audiences might have been moved a little. Nothing better then, when a character gets to have a bit of redemption”, Crystal said, in a pleasantly calm tone as tendrils from her back lifted her back to her feet before retracting. “Like I said before. There is no escaping me tonight. So, let’s not beat around the bush any further. It’s time you faced one of my deepest fears. Something I always imagined laid waiting for me in the deepest corners of the dark”, Crystal continued, giggling as her voice morphed between female and male as though multiple people were talking at once.

Robin stood her ground grabbing the wrist device that fires countless batarangs preparing herself for whatever Clayface had up his sleeve. Crystal's neck began to elongate like a snake's body slithering its way out of a hole as her hair became longer and ragged. Her skin became gray as her lips became scarlet red as the white in her eyes darkened pure black and sunk back in their sockets. Her arms and legs elongated to absurd lengths as her fingers became long thin claws. Her torso also elongated like the rest of the body till she was fifteen feet tall. Robin gazed upon this monstrosity in absolute terror as chills filled her body as she remembered this monster being one of the creatures that were drawn in Clayface's fear room. This monstrosity stared at Robin with an abnormally large toothless smile before rows of large sharp teeth appeared in the maw of this eldritch beast. Robin's fight or flight finally took over as she simply opened the door behind her leading into the other displays. A cackle that sounded like a legion of different voices laughing simultaneously echoed throughout the Tunnel of Love filling Robin with dread. A loud thud was felt on the floor making Robin aware that Clayface is on all fours before more thuds could be felt as the laugh grew louder and closer. She quickly tried to make her way out of the Tunnel of Love but in her peripheral vision the monster crawled along the walls opposite side of the canal before leaping to her side cutting her off from the tunnel's entrance. The monster took a swipe at her with its large thin fingered claws making Robin stop abruptly taking a leap backwards as the claws carved through the attraction's floor. Like a snake Clayface used his long neck to lounge his monstrous head forward opening his smiling mouth wide as though to chomp down on Robin who did a quick flip back to her feet and used her agility to dodge out of the way as Clayface smashed its head through the wall that lead to the next display of the attraction. Robin quickly attached the device to her wrist and started unloading the electrical batarangs on Clayface. Each one penetrating the gray skin discharging electricity into the monster making it retract its head wailing and twitching as its large frame made for an easy target. Robin fired a few more batarangs as she then made a run for it sliding underneath Clayface's elongated body, while he was distracted. She landed in one of the rides, swan boats getting ready to leap into the next boat ahead of her. Clayface noticed as he raised his claw up to crush her and right as he brought it down Robin leaped onto the heart shaped boat in front of her as Clayface completely smashed the swan boat with water splashing all over his clawed hand. Robin quickly turned to notice that the claw lost its form and texture becoming a reddish brown liquidy clay substance. Clayface focused on reshaping his hand back into a gray claw as Robin quickly lept back onto the walkway with the displays making a run for it. Clayface regained his focus and continued his hunt to kill Robin. Clayface moved quickly smashing through all the walls of the attraction obliterating the displays. He was quickly catching up to Robin using his elongated neck to hover his horrifying oversized head above her before bringing it down with his mouth open and teeth bared as though going for another chomp. Out of the darkness of the tunnel a batarang flew striking Clayface in the top of his scalp discharging electricity making him lose concentration and wail, while Robin remained focused ignoring the monstrous wailing continuing to run deeper into the tunnel noticing Nightwing approaching her.

"Robin are you alright", Nightwing asked, in a worried tone.

"NIGHTWING RUN", Robin shouted, as she ran past him heading deeper into the tunnel.

Nightwing took off after her into the pink cavern designed portion of the attraction as thuds could be heard of Clayface quickly following behind them. Robin and Nightwing could hear and see the foundation of the ride shaking as they sprinted through the water filled caverns. Thankfully the water was shallow enough so it wasn't too difficult to run, but they both noticed that they didn't hear Clayface moving directly behind them. The sound of claws rapidly digging into the material the caverns were coming from Clayface's elongated body crawling along the ceiling. Robin fired the remainder of the batarangs she had in her wrist device at Clayface whose neck was twisted so his head stared down at the two heroes. He raised his fist and like a flower rapidly blooming opened his hand extending his elongated fingers repelling the batarangs and taking a few swipes with his claw at the heroes as they quickly used their agility to dodge out of the way. Nightwing attempted to hide behind a pair of large fake stalagmites, but immediately had to move from cover as they were smashed to pieces when Clayface swung his claw at him. Robin tried firing discharge pellets from her slingshot, but despite Clayface's size he was very elusive even when crawling around the ceiling as he continued swiping at the duo trying to tear them apart. Robin and Nightwing were able to dodge the attacks, but barely. The only reason they've survived this long was due to their extensive training and agility. Despite how terrified Robin and Nightwing were, the only thought running through their minds was to keep moving and keep dodging until they could think of a way to escape. One of Clayface's swipes hit Nightwing knocking him against the fake cavern walls knocking the wind out of him. Robin continued firing her explosive pellets trying to get Clayface's attention long enough for Nightwing to get back to his feet. Clayface swiped and grabbed at Robin with his elongated fingers at times slicing through Robin's armor and cutting her cheek. Nightwing pulled out his escrima sticks and Robin managed to maneuver her way over to him readying themselves for another assault when the attacks suddenly stopped. They both noticed Clayface was no longer focusing on them, but instead stared at the exit and very quickly made his way out of the Tunnel of Love. Robin and Nightwing were mixed with an array of emotions at the circumstances feeling relieved, confused, and scared as to why he would leave the fight. They both realized that one of Waller's plans must've worked and the monster was now heading their way. Before Nightwing had a chance to contact Batman, Oracle was heard.

"Nightwing, thank god you answered, are you Robin and alright? Batman is trying to radio you", she said, worriedly.

"Oracle, hurry up and patch him through. He needs to get away from where he is", said Nightwing in a frightened tone.

"Okay, I'll patch you through now", she said, quickly connecting comms between him and Batman.

"Batman! You need to run! RIGHT NOW! RUN!", shouted Nightwing, in a horrified tone.

"Nightwing! What happened? Is Robin alright", Batman asked, in a concerned tone.

“Batman, it’s going to kill everyone! Just runaway”, Nightwing shouted. “Batman! You hear me get out of there! Robin let’s hurry, that thing will tear everyone to pieces”, Nightwing continued, looking over to Robin.

“Roger that, but what can we actually do? Nothing we have can hurt Clayface in that form”, asked Robin, worriedly.

“I don’t know, but hey sometimes you gotta improvise. Let’s just back up Batman and save who we can for now and hope a solution appears”, said Nightwing, frustrated.

“Did you notice he stayed on the ceiling? And he kept his attacks from getting low enough to touch the water”, Robin asked, in a curious tone.

“You’re right. He was avoiding it wasn’t he”, he said, as though an idea started to form.

“Aren’t there a bunch of fire trucks close by?”, Robin asked, curiously.

“Yes, yes there certainly are”, Nightwing said, realizing there might be a fighting chance as they looked at each other with the same idea.

The monstrous Clayface tore through the attractions to get to the container as soldiers started open firing on the massive beast with little effect as it used its large claws to crush and tear through the soldiers that attacked it. It wasn’t a fight, but pure slaughter as the soldiers didn’t stand a chance with the monster using its large maw to chomp down on soldiers he wasn’t already crushing or slicing into pieces with its hands. The monster became drenched in blood before making its way to the container as Waller retreated back behind her barricade with several soldiers coming to her aid to protect her. Clayface attempted to lift the container, but was electrocuted. Knowing now the container had a generator he started looking for the source, swiping away and crushing all soldiers who got in his way as Batman tried to get his attention away from the container using explosive batarangs, but to no avail as the monster found the generator smashing it, with the electricity no longer protecting the container, the monster lifted the container freeing the other half of himself. The human half of Clayface smiled at his freedom, sticking his hands in his hoodie pocket as the monster hovered above him. The monster started to melt on top of the human Clayface, drowning his whole form in a reddish brown mass of liquid clay that twisted and morphed. Gordon who was dragging a wounded soldier away from danger behind the barricade line receiving a call from his bat phone confused knowing Batman was closeby.

“Hello, who is this”, he asked, in a confused tone.

“Commissioner Gordon, this is Oracle. I work with Batman and we need your help”, said Oracle, in an augmented voice.

“Okay sure what can I do”, Gordon asked, in a curious tone.

"Nightwing and Robin learnt that Clayface is negatively affected by water. We need you to call in the fire department and have them help", said Oracle.

"Wait wait, you're telling me the solution to beating this thing is to spray it with water", he asked, in a dumbfounded tone.

"It's not a guarantee it'll beat him, but I'd think you'd be willing to try anything at this point right", asked Oracle.

"Okay, okay I'll call them in now. Thanks for the tip", he said, hanging up and making a call to the fire chief. "Hey Grant look this is gonna sound weird, but just hear me out", Gordon speaking with the chief trying not to sound insane.

Back on the pier the reddish brown morphing mound started to take shape into a massive body formed with two large legs, six huge clawed arms, and a giant mass as a head where many skeleton like faces formed all around the front, the sides, and the back with countless tendrils wiggling about its body. The clay formed monster turned to face Batman.

"Tell me Batman. Knowing that you never had any hope of defeating me", Clayface said, in a legion of voices echoing.

Clayface had his tendrils try to slice and grab Batman, but he used his agility and the attractions to shield him from the blows as he leaped behind one of the carnival games. Batman simply pulled out his grappling hook and an explosive batarang knowing he had to figure out a way to keep Clayface busy. Before he could make a move Clayface was hit with multiple small explosives as Robin and Nightwing suddenly grappled their way next to Batman, while the ARGUS soldiers continued firing upon the monster.

"Batman, it's water. Water has a negative effect on him. We had Oracle contact Gordon to bring in the fire department", said Robin, preparing for another round with the monster.

"Then I guess it's a good thing Waller has rigged the whole pier to blow. We need to get his attention and lure him further into the pier. The fire engines will help, but until they get here it's on us" said Batman.

The fight continued as soldiers open fired on Clayface though having little to no effect due to his size as the monster used his tendrils to grab the soldiers flinging them around before launching them like a catapult at the barricade line. Soldiers thrown by Clayface smashed into vehicles and into other soldiers causing death or critical injury. Gordon made his way over to Waller ducking trying not to get hit by a flying soldier. Armored vehicles fired their heavy machine guns as other soldiers fired grenades from their grenade launchers hitting Clayface with all the fire power they had. Clayface was able to extend his massive monstrous arms

grabbing the vehicles and tossing them into the ocean or making them crash into nearby attractions. Gordon was able to make it to Waller despite the chaos.

"If we can't push him back, Charlie isn't going to work", said Waller, with a frustrated worried tone.

"We figured out a way to keep him on the pier. We're going to use the fire engines. The bastard doesn't like water, so this is the best hope we got", said Gordon, getting out from cover and firing his rifle at Clayface.

Batman, Nightwing, and Robin all came out from their cover all tossing explosive batarangs at Clayface. Due to all the faces on Clayface's alien-like head they couldn't tell if they got his attention until something started to happen. Three of the faces looked like they were starting to push their way out of the body's mass as three clay-like globs fell from the head hitting the pier floor. The three globs molded themselves into three distinct shapes each shape recognized by each hero. Nightwing came face to face with a familiar enemy as the mold formed the huge mercenary in black he fought back at Stagg's warehouse.

"I've been itching for a round two with you asshole", said Nightwing, getting into a fighting stance with his escrima sticks.

The next mold Robin was already expecting as it took the form of Crystal in her all black attire as she formed her hands into hammers smiling at Robin, while Robin got out her slingshot readying herself for another fight. The third mold took the form of Basil Karlo with his arms forming into blades as Batman also prepared for their clash. The three Clayface's charged at the heroes, while Batman and his allies used their grappling hooks to give them space from their enemies, but the Clayface's were quick and able to jump great heights displaying superhuman agility and strength. Robin and Nightwing both decide to fight together, leading their pursuers to the roller coaster, while Batman leads Basil to the Ferris Wheel.

While the heroes were busy Gordon and Waller were relieved when several fire engines arrived hooking their hoses up to the closest fire hydrants getting their trucks ready before Gordon had them open fire the water onto the Clayface monster. The remaining Argus soldiers pulled back, gathering their wounded as the water cut through Clayface's tendrils with ease as they wriggled on the pier floor before slithering their way back to the main body. Clayface tried to use his massive arms to grab at the fire engines but the water pressure from the hoses easily sliced up his arms amputating them, making the hands collapse to the pier. One of these amputated hands looked to have fallen on top of a soldier crushing his leg as two other soldiers along with Gordon were able to pull him out from under the hand before it moved using the fingers crawling like a spider back to the main body. Gordon carried the soldier back behind the barricade line and onto a stretcher to be carried in one of Argus' ambulances then to an Argus aid station. The fire hoses continuously blasted water through the monster pushing him back. The plan was starting to work.

Batman was having his fight on the Ferris Wheel with Basil Karlo dodging his bladed arms and agile high kicks, while countering with punches, quick strikes, and kicks trying to knock Basil off the Ferris Wheel and into the water below. Batman spoke, seeing if Basil would reply.

“What are you”, he asked, in a dark gruff tone.

“A fragment. Nothing more”, said the fragment of Basil Karlo, in a monotone voice before louncing in for another attack on Batman.

Batman battled Basil to the top of the Ferris Wheel going blow for blow, while subtly planting little explosives around the fragment body unbeknownst to it, not setting them off until they got to the top. When they made it to the top the fragment tried to cut down the hero, but Batman set off one charge after another making the explosives knock the fragment off balance. Batman got the opening he needed to grab Basil by the hoodie and threw it off of the Ferris Wheel into the ocean. The fragment attempted to extend one of its arms to catch a part of the Ferris Wheel to save itself, but a batarang came out of nowhere blasting the arm preventing the fragment from saving itself as it fell into the water below. When it hit the water it tried to swim, but rapidly fell apart like a dirt clot before disappearing under the ripples of the water. Batman got his comms to contact Nightwing.

“Batman to Nightwing come in”, he said, still in his dark gruff tone.

Nightwing and Robin were having their own battle with the fragments, but they both could tell something was off. When Nightwing fought the merc who mainly used his large body to attack, but was missing the boxing techniques. Robin noticed Crystal was fighting more like a senseless animal instead of a calculating vicious murderer. There were no taunts coming from Crystal, not even a sadistic smile.

“Hey, did you notice something off about your opponent”, Nightwing asked Robin while dodging heavy attacks and countering them.

“Yes, this isn’t the Crystal I’ve fought before”, Robin said, performing multiple flips blasting Crystal with several exploding pellets from her slingshot.

“I agree, I feel like this is just a cheap knockoff of the guy I fought back in Bludhaven”, said Nightwing, confused as he could hear Batman trying to contact him.

“Nightwing, do you read me? You’re fighting small fragments of Clayface’s full body and personality; they’re weaker than the enemy we’ve been fighting. Knock them in the water I’ll make my way over to you”, said Batman.

“Copy that Batman, I’ll pass it along to Robin”, said Nightwing, managing to dodge and maneuver out of range of the mercenaries’ attacks.

“What’s going on”, Robin asked, curiously.

“Batman just confirmed what we already suspected. These are just fragments not the real deal. Just knock them off the pier and they’re done”, Nightwing said, as he and Robin were able to knock away their opponents.

The two fragments got back to their feet, but were too slow to form an attack on the heroes. Their speed, gadgets, and techniques overpowered the fragments with their only true asset, which was their healing factor. It could eventually have given them the edge if Nightwing and Robin didn’t already know exactly how to defeat them. Using the same spherical device Batman had used against Clayface earlier, Robin was able to use the device to explode translucent gel all over the feet of the mercenary fragment trapping him long enough for the hero duo to isolate Crystal and double team her. The duo made quick work of the fragment hitting her with Nightwing’s escrima sticks and discharge pellets from Robin’s slingshot knocking Crystal to the edge of the roller coaster platform. Nightwing tossed an electrical bola wrapping around Crystal, trapping her and electrifying her long enough for Robin to kick the fragment off the platform as it fell in the water never to come back up. The merc fragment was able to lift his leg as though he was removing himself from his trapped limb like a piece of clothing as a new limb instantly grew in its place, but instead of continuing his attack on the heroes it leaped from the roller coaster back down to the pier floor and headed back to the main body. Robin and Nightwing looked at each other confused before noticing Batman gliding towards them landing on the platform.

“Are you both alright? Were you able to beat the fragments”, Batman asked curiously.

“Well, we took down one of them. The other ran away from the fight and headed back to the main body”, said Robin, in a concerned tone as she noticed a look she’s never seen on Batman, a look of worry.

Batman walked along the platform looking upon the monstrous body of Clayface still being pushed back by the fire hoses. The fragment leaped into one of the legs of the main body being absorbed immediately. Suddenly, Clayface’s monstrous form imploded and collapsed on itself compressing down into a human sized shape as the reddish brown featureless humanoid molded itself back into Basil Karlo. He leaped back out of range of the fire hose’s water then pulled out a flip phone from his hoodie pocket. He dialed a number calling Plastique uttering only a few words.

“Take out the fire trucks”, he said, before hanging up and putting the phone back in his pocket, smiling sinisterly at Waller and Gordon.

Before anyone realized what was happening it was too late as several RPG rockets were fired from buildings behind the barricade line. The rockets exploded on impact hitting the fire trucks decimating them, killing most of the crews on board. The explosion made Gordon and Waller fly back hitting hard on the pavement putting them both in a daze. Clayface smiled upon the carnage before turning his attention towards Batman and his proteges on the roller coaster

as his smile faded into a cold hateful scowl. Multiple spider-like legs protruded from his back then charged with incredible speed towards their location. Clayface moved so quickly the heroes barely had time to prepare for the encounter. Clayface climbed up the side of the roller coaster within seconds already on top of the heroes before they had time to react. One of Clayface's legs came down stabbing into Robin's shoulder pinning her to the platform as she screamed in agony. Nightwing tried to move in to help her, but Clayface morphed one of his arms into tendril-like tentacles that wrapped around Nightwing lifting him up and tossing him far away off the roller coaster into the ocean below. Simultaneously, before Batman was able to make a move, one of Clayface's spider legs smashed into him so hard the strike imprinted on his armor making him fly into the rides tracks by the platform. The strike knocked the wind out of him as he coughed to catch his breath. Clayface then looked down at Robin who was bleeding and writhing in pain from the puncture in her shoulder. He grabbed her by the neck, removing his sharp leg from her shoulder, while lifting her up. Clayface ripped off Carrie's mask before speaking.

"Masks are for heroes not victims. Hmmm, doesn't this seem familiar? Wait, it does! I distinctly remember how the last Robin died. Filmed by the news before being executed for the public to see. Who knows, you could've inspired the next generation like the former did. When Batman sees you die he'll know the mistake he made, ever taking you in the first place. Children like you aren't heroes, you're canon fodder. You never stood a chance. And that's on him. Not on you. And he will live his last few moments on this Earth knowing he got you killed. Another failed attempt at a protege. But at least you'll be with Michelle again right. I did make a promise after all", Clayface said in a cold gleeful tone.

Clayface formed a clawhammer in his hand making Carrie know her death will be the same as Michelle's as it was always meant to be. He lifted it in the air to bring down the killing blow. Carrie's whole life flashed within seconds from when she first met Michelle, winning her first gymnastics competition, seeing Jason's death on the news, becoming Robin, taking down her first purse snatcher, meeting Batman, all of it. She closed her eyes awaiting for the killing blow before a bright light shined on her face coming from behind Clayface's head. Oracle's drone hovered right behind him as the light on Carrie's face caught Clayface's attention. He turned to see the hovering drone when it unexpectedly fired a dart into his head, simultaneously Carrie pulled out a couple of explosive charges from her utility belt. The electrical discharge made Clayface loosen his grasp giving Robin the opportunity to use her legs to kick off of his chest using rubber from her boots to protect her from the powerful discharge that only lasted a few seconds. It was enough time for Robin to backflip her way to the ground, throwing the explosives as they attached to Clayface's torso. Right as Robin detonated the explosives blasting several holes in Clayface's body disorientating him, simultaneously Batman got back to his feet and swiftly threw two electrical bolas that wrapped around Clayface's arms and legs clinging them to his deformed body. While all this was happening Waller came to her senses enough to pull out the remote to detonate all the bombs under the pier pressing the button. Multiple explosions started going off around the pier as Oracle's drone flew away, while Carrie took this one last opportunity to uppercut Clayface off the edge of the roller coaster platform making him fall towards the pier floor out of sight as she fell to her knees too tired to move as

blood continued to flow from her wound. Batman made his way over to Robin opening his gauntlet calling on the bat jet as everything blew up all around them. The roller coaster began to fall apart when Batman reached Robin who was comforting her wounded shoulder. Batman lifted up Robin and carried her to the top of the roller coaster's first drop. The bat jet reached them with just enough time for the duo to grab the ladder that was lowered. The bat jet lifted up in the air automatically rolling up the ladder, while the entire pier collapsed into the ocean.

"Thanks for the save, boss. You think Nightwing's okay", asked Robin, in a worried tone.

"It'll take more than that to finish him. He'll be alright. You did well Robin ", Batman said, as he lifted Robin into the bat jet.

Waller and Gordon looked upon the destruction with the few surviving Argus soldiers moving everything back and transporting the injured. Gordon noticed Batman and Robin entering the bat jet sighing with huge relief. Nightwing, despite his injuries, managed to swim back to shore making his way to his motorbike. Oracle's drone flew down beside him with Barbara's voice coming out.

"Dick, thank god you're okay. I was beginning to worry", she said.

"Thanks Barb, may wanna call on Leslie to meet us back at the cave. We're going to need her to patch us up a little", said Nightwing, in an exhausted tone.

"No problem. You just get back here safely. Batman and Robin are already on their way", Oracle said, in a relieved tone.

"Good I'm glad they both made it out. I'll be there soon", Nightwing said, as he took his time struggling to breath walking back to the motorbike.

Back at what was left of the Gotham pier Gordon and Waller still looked upon the destruction. They then looked at one another before Gordon spoke.

"Think we got him", Gordon asked, begrudgingly.

"Let's hope so. I don't even wanna think of the consequences if we didn't. I'll be heading back to my HQ in Washington to give my report. I'll have agents here for a little while scoping out the area in case things get noisy again. You Commissioner, better also keep your eyes and ears open. Best we all be prepared for the worst to come if it does", said Waller, pulling out a cigarette and lighting it.

"I'm sure the news will have plenty to talk about come tomorrow morning. That in itself will be a headache, but thankfully we kept the damage contained", Gordon said, rubbing his eyes before cleaning his glasses.

“There won’t be a lot of clear footage. My people hacked the signals of the outlets that showed up blurring out most of the action that took place. I wasn’t about to let that bastard Basil Karlo have the debut he desired”, said Waller, taking a puff of smoke.

“Good. The sooner we can move forward from all this the better”, said Gordon, feeling his phone ringing. He pulled it out to see it was his wife Sarah. “Hey, Sarah. Yeah, I’m okay sweetie. I’m heading home now. I know. I know. I’ll see you home soon hun”, Gordon said walking away from the scene.

A good distance away from all the chaos at the Gotham pier, Plastique looked upon the pier’s destruction. She checked her phone noticing there was no reply to any of her messages for Basil. A look of pure anger came over her face as she started coming to terms she may have lost another team member to Waller. No way was she going to let the heroes win tonight. She refuses to let everyone walk away with a victory, while she’s again left with nothing. Plastique pulled out a detonator ready to push the button, but tried calling Basil as a last ditch effort to confirm he survived. No answer was received. She looked down at the detonator as Basil’s face, Netbug’s face, and her brother’s face all flashed in her mind as tears formed. All the memories under Waller’s control, left powerless to fight back as her friends and family all died for nothing. Not this time.

“Fuck you Waller”, Plastique said, in a rage filled tone pressing the button.

Batman and Robin were flying high through the air unbeknownst the true horror was about to hit Gotham. When the first building exploded both Batman and Robin’s hearts sank. Then the next building exploded. Nothing could be done to stop it. Gordon, Waller, and Nightwing could all feel the seismic waves of the buildings falling, not truly grasping what is currently transpiring in Gotham City. Another building exploded and Robin couldn’t look anymore. Batman continued to look on in a quiet rage knowing there is nothing he could do. Gordon and Waller started calling on their people confirming what was happening. Another building exploded and collapsed. The whole of downtown Gotham was in a panic. Robin could no longer hold back the tears. Oracle watched back at the cave in absolute disbelief. Her mind was in a state of shock with hands clasped on her mouth. She didn’t even hear the metal tray and china smash onto the cave floor that dropped from Alfred’s hands as he looked upon the destruction in horror. Everyone anticipated the next explosion, but after a few moments no more buildings exploded and collapsed as all of Gotham was left with was tragedy and the coming sorrow for those who’ve lost more than most could bear. After watching the devastation she caused Gotham, a vibration was felt from her phone. Plastique checked to see that she received a message from Basil with only an emoji of a winking smiling face. A look came over Plastique’s face. It started with brief regret, but the longer she looked upon the despair and dread Plastique delivered to Gotham, a broken smile began to grow on her face as tears flowed down her cheeks.

Chapter 15: Hello There

A week has gone by since what the news media was calling the Devastation of Gotham. The clean up was underway with the news still talking about the events that took place with Downtown Gotham. The news outlets blamed Basil Karlo for the destruction of the city. Bodies were still being recovered from the rubble of the demolished buildings. The body count numbered in the thousands. All forms of emergency services were stretched thin. Wayne Enterprises called on their construction sector to assist in clearing out debris and finding people in the rubble. Batman and all in his circle worked tirelessly to do what they could to help Gotham and its citizens through this time of shock and turmoil. This was an event that united the whole country to send aid and assistance to Gotham. When the dust started to settle, the citizens of Gotham would begin to mourn their losses. At Wayne Manor things were somber and quiet. Carrie left her room dressed in a black dress and black shoes with her short red hair made up nicely and wearing a little eyeliner. She made her way to the main lobby where Alfred awaited her. When she made it down the steps Alfred spoke.

"Ms. Kelley, are you ready to depart?", he asked.

"I am Alfred thank you for this", Carrie said, with a small smile.

"After the week you've had Ms. Kelley, any request you have is of no consequence", said Alfred, in his proper tone.

Carrie gave Alfred a small hug as Alfred accepted. Before they headed out the door quick moving footsteps raced from the kitchen. Dick was carrying flowers as he rushed over to Carrie and Alfred.

"Wait, Carrie! I have flowers for your friend", Dick said, catching his breath holding white and red roses quickly regaining his composure. "Here, these are for Michelle. I wasn't there for her funeral and wanted to show my support somehow", Dick said, handing Carrie who looked confused, but thankful taking the flowers in hand.

"Thank you Dick. I appreciate it and I know Michelle would too", Carrie said, giving Dick a thankful smile.

"Of course, it was no problem. If you'd like I could accompany you", Dick said, in a friendly tone.

"That's alright. It's sweet of you to offer, but it's just going to be a quick trip and then we'll be back. Plus, Bruce may need you more than me right now. And Dick even though I still owe you a few more shots to the face. Thanks for having my back at the pier", Carrie said, as she walked over to Dick giving him a hug. Before walking away she punched him in the shoulder.

"Ow! That was a cheap shot", Dick said, comforting his shoulder.

“Round two won’t end in the draw”, joked Carrie, as she and Alfred exited the front door.

After Dick watched Carrie and Alfred drive off as he headed down to the batcave. When he made it to the bottom he saw Bruce working on the bat-computer looking through the Stagg files. Dick made his way over to Bruce noticing files on Basil Karlo as well as files on other subjects Simon Stagg tested on.

“Hey, Bruce. How are you holding up”, Dick asked, curiously.

“As well as one could in the situation we’re in. Is Barbara with Jim”, asked Bruce, in a curious tone.

“Yeah, she heard her step-mom was coming home and wanted to be there. But seriously Bruce, how are you doing?”, Dick asked, worriedly.

“Between dealing with the catastrophe, locating Plastique, and confirming Basil Karlo’s demise. Plus, how to go about dealing with the crimes Simon Stagg has committed on these files. There’s much work to be done”, said Bruce in a tired tone.

“Yes, but we will tackle one thing at a time. We can deduce Plastique was the one who detonated the bombs that night. Leaving Clayface to take the fall for it all”, said Dick, as he sat up against the desk of the bat computer.

“Or he devised the plan. And she simply executed it. Either way if we’re going to put an end to this case we’ll have to take her down. I don’t think she’ll be causing anymore trouble in Gotham”, said Bruce.

“She already blew it to hell. What more could she do”, asked Dick, in a sarcastic tone.

“She could always do more as long as a single building stands. But she knows I’m after her now with or without her most dangerous ally. So, she’ll stay far away from Gotham thinking it’ll clear her tracks. When I already know where she’s going”, said Bruce, in a cold methodical tone.

“Where is that”, asked Dick, curiously.

“She’s going where Waller is. I did some digging on a laptop we got from a fallen comrade of Plastique and Clayface. We learned more about an Argus project called Task Force X. And the methods they use on their soldiers. They are injected with explosives in their necks and forced to take on missions that are practically suicidal as well as need to know. Plastique and her brother were a part of this task force. They completed a mission that was severely sensitive to national security. Because they completed the mission and survived they were all a liability. Waller killed them all. Plastique’s brother included. Before she could detonate Plastique’s bomb, the one who designed the signal to trigger the bombs had a change of heart and saved her.

Waller and Stagg both created their monsters. Those who want retribution for the wrongs casted upon their lives as they burn the world down around them”, said Bruce, as he started pondering on the best approach on what to do next.

“Bruce. Is that how you feel with us? That you did us wrong bringing us into your life and training us”, Dick asked.

“I know I have a lot to make up for. By you and Barbara both. And currently doing the best I can to do right by Carrie. Your anger towards me was always justified. I’m sorry Dick. To you, to Barbara, and to Jason”, said Bruce, in a sorrowful tone.

“Well, then it’s a good thing we have time to make it right. Just so you know. Barbara never blamed you. Not once for ending up the way she is. And Jason.....he was a huge pain in the ass”, giggled Dick, as though thinking back on the past. “But I never ever heard him once say he regretted joining the mission. He loved being Robin as I did. And I know him and Carrie would hate each other. But eventually Carrie would’ve looked out for that little jackass”, Dick smiled, as tears formed in his eyes.

“I think so too. We can do this. As a team we will catch Plastique and end this case”, said Bruce, giving Dick a reassuring smile.

“Then we’ll get to work when Carrie gets back”, said Dick, sticking out his hand for a shake.

“Agreed”, said Bruce, grabbing Dick’s hand as they shook on their agreement.

At Jim Gordon’s home after a week of chaos began to finally brighten as his wife Sarah came home. For the first time in a long time Gordon was fulfilled having both his daughter and his wife by his side. Oswald Cobblepot was found bound and gagged in front of the GCPD building. He was no longer himself as though still mentally afflicted by his defeat to Clayface and Plastique. He had enough resources and energy to slowly get back on his feet using his riches to help victims of the devastation as well as begin thinking on ideas for a new Iceberg Lounge. Carrie with Alfred at her side went to the Gotham cemetery to place flowers given to her by Dick on Michelle’s grave as she began telling her story to Michelle about everything that had transpired. A time of rebuilding and mourning hit Gotham as things had quieted down again after a few weeks went by.

Simon Stagg made it to his facility with his assistant Madeline and multiple security operatives in full tactical gear escorting him throughout the building. He spoke on the phone, while he was being escorted.

“Yes, Madam Mayor, I assure you that the city of Gotham can rely on support from Stagg Industries in helping with rebuilding. Yes. Yes, and to support the families of lost loved ones. Madam Mayor I am aware of the statement made by the terrorist that caused the attack, but until there’s further evidence to support those claims I am under no further obligation to do

anymore thank you. Anything more can be taken up with my lawyers, have a good day", Simon said, doing his best to keep his calm demeanor quickly hanging up the phone. "Fucking bitch. Madeline please get in touch with my lawyers. Tell them they have their work cut out for them. Ever since that piece of shit Basil Karlo dropped my name and made good on his threats it's been one thing after another ", Simon continued, angrily with Madeline going to her office as another phone call came through on his cellphone. "Hello Murphy, yes I'm fully aware our stocks plummeted. That's what happens when a goddamn terrorist tells the public I created him. When the wolf barks the fucking sheep follows. Look, move my finances somewhere the feds can't freeze. I have a feeling that's a possibility coming next. Thank you Murphy. And get my family out of the country for a little while please just to be safe. Thank you again", Stagg continued, hanging up his phone.

Simon and his security detail made it to the outside of his office as he turned looking at the leader of the unit and spoke. "Thank you for the escort Captain. Go ahead and take the men back down to my vehicle. I'll only be here for about an hour or so", said Stagg, before using his hand print scanner to open his door.

"Yes, sir", said the Captain, as he and his men headed back to the elevator.

Simon used the hand print scanner unlocking his office door and entering making sure it closed behind him. He flicked on the lights brightening up the marble office and started walking towards his desk looking down at his phone going through all his emails. He was so focused on what he was doing he never noticed that opposite of the marble pillars someone was walking beside him matching his steps without a sound. Simon stopped in front of his desk responding to one of his many emails not noticing until he felt a cold metal cylinder touch the back of his neck making him completely freeze. He heard a voice speak from behind him.

"Hello there. It's been a long time, Simon. Slowly hand me the phone please", said the voice, in a calm pleasant tone.

Simon didn't hesitate as he raised his phone to the side of his head. A hand gently took the phone from Simon's. It was quiet for a moment when suddenly Simon heard the phone dropped to the ground behind him as it was stomped on. The voice spoke again.

"Please Simon, take a seat in front of your desk", said the voice, still in that calm pleasant tone.

Simon pulled out the chair in front of him and he took a seat. He felt the cold cylinder remove itself from his neck as he started hearing footsteps move from around him to the side of the desk. He looked to see Basil Karlo with his hair slicked back wearing a black suit and black tie. He had a cold devious smile on his face as he made his way over to Simon's chair taking a seat still aiming a pistol with a silencer attached at Simon. Basil opened his mouth to speak.

"So, shall we start from the beginning", Basil said, smiling sinisterly.

To Be Continued.....